NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

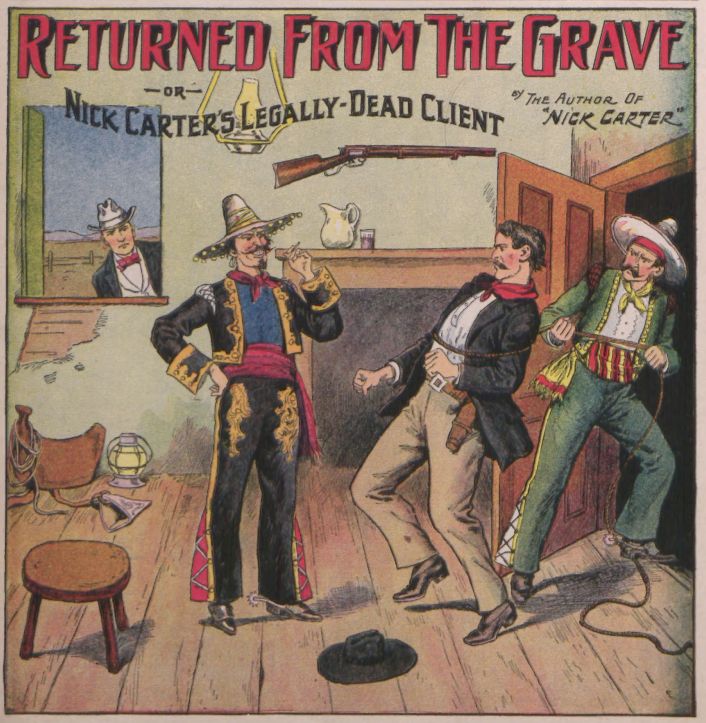
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 554 NEW YORK, AUGUST 10, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE

—OR— NICK CARTER'S LEGALLY-DEAD CLIENT

By THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Nick Carter watched the proceeding, and before he could do anything to prevent it, the noose was dropped over Buck's head, and he was jerked backward through the door.

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Returned From the Grave

OR,

NICK CARTER'S LEGALLY-DEAD CLIENT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

MR. BLACK OF ALASKA.

Nick Carter, accompanied by his old friend Buck Hawkins, lately returned from a long stay in the mining regions of Alaska and the adjacent territory, were strolling together down Madison Avenue in New York on a Sunday morning.

It was exactly eleven o'clock when they turned diagonally across the avenue at Twenty-fifth Street toward the square, and they had advanced along the pathway almost to the fountain in the middle of the parklike square when Hawkins stopped abruptly, grasped the arm of the detective and turned him unceremoniously about while he himself stared without speaking toward a man who had just passed them, moving in the opposite direction. It was only three days after the closing scenes of the detective's preceding case, concerning which Hawkins had been more or less interested, and the memory of it was still fresh in the minds of both men.*

They had been conversing upon indifferent subjects, smoking as they walked along, and the detective was therefore somewhat surprised by the abrupt act of his companion when he wheeled him about so suddenly and then stood speechless and staring.

"What in the world is the matter with you, Buck?" he demanded.

"A ghost, or the devil—or Godfrey Chester; I don't know which," replied the miner. "Did you notice that chap who passed us just now, Nick?"

"I noticed that a man passed us, going the other way; I believe that you are staring at his back right now," replied the detective.

"Did you get a good look at him, Nick?" persisted Hawkins.

"Not particularly. I looked at him only as I would regard any chance passer-by; nothing more than that."

"Well, that man is either Godfrey Chester, or Chester Godfrey, or the ghost of one or both of them—or, as I intimated before, the devil himself."

"Nonsense!" said the detective, half-laughing. "You are getting woozy, Buck, over that affair in the Klondike."

"I repeat, Nick, that——"

"Buck, we are almost positive that one of those double-named cousins is dead; we are reasonably certain that the

*See No. 553 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Mystery of the Klondike."

other one is also. To the best of my knowledge and belief, there is no legal heir to all of the millions that Godfrey Chester dug up out of the earth in Alaska, and it is foolish to suppose that after what we know about the history of that man and his cousin, he could appear here on the streets of New York."

"All the same," said Buck, without removing his gaze from the figure of the man who had attracted his attention, "that man who just passed us was one of those cousins; I know, because I never forget a face."

Nick smiled, and then he said:

"As I remember your history of the case, Buck, you have never seen but one of those cousins who looked so much alike and yet not exactly alike."

"No, Nick," replied the miner, "and that is precisely what makes me think it all the more likely that the man who just passed us may be Godfrey Chester himself, the one whom I never saw."

The detective laughed outright at this.

"That is rather a Hibernianism, isn't it, Buck?" he asked, "when you claim to recognize a man by sight whom you never saw?"

"Ah, Nick, stop your joshing. You knew well enough what I mean. Godfrey Chester went to the Klondike country four years before I did, and the man whom I went up with on the ship was only his cousin, although he told me he was Godfrey Chester; but he was Chester Godfrey instead. He was the man I lived with and worked for; who tried to kill me and who almost succeeded. But I want you to know, Nick, that I have seen enough and heard enough to understand that those two men were so nearly alike that if you had seen one you had practically seen the other one as well."

"All right," said Nick, laughing. "Have it any way you please."

"It isn't any way I please," insisted Buck doggedly, "it is the way in which it impresses me. If I put two and two together and think it over calmly, I figure it out that Chester Godfrey killed his cousin, Godfrey Chester, just about as we were told that it happened. Then that gambler whom you arrested and who was posing in the character of Godfrey Chester, is supposed to have killed the other one. Anyhow, he told us that he left the man for dead. I am of the opinion now, that although he left Chester for dead, Chester afterward revived just as I did after I was shot."

The detective shrugged his shoulders, and, turning about, they resumed their walk, while Nick said:

"Isn't it just as likely, Buck, that the gambler sure enough succeeded in killing his man, who was Chester Godfrey, and that Godfrey Chester was the one who went to the Klondike four years before you did, who has come to life again?"

The miner did not reply. He felt that the detective was quietly guying him, and he resented it; not exactly with displeasure, but rather with impatience.

The sight of the man he had just passed in the middle of the square recalled to him vividly all that he had passed through while in the North, and it revived in him every incentive to action he had felt when he left the Klondike to come to New York.

They walked along in silence again after that until they entered the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where the detective left the miner alone in the wide corridor while he himself went to attend to some business that he had to do.

He was absent almost half an hour, and when he returned he was surprised to discover Buck Hawkins standing near the front doorway of the hotel, engaged in a conversation with the very man who had excited his interest and comment when they encountered him in crossing Madsion Square.

The face of the stranger was toward the detective, and Nick, therefore, had a good opportunity to study it, which he did with considerable care, for it must be remembered that although so intimately connected with the incidents in the lives of the double cousins, Godfrey Chester and Chester Godfrey, he had never really seen either of them.

But only a moment or two passed before Hawkins turned so that he saw the detective, and at once he signaled for him to draw near.

"Nick," he said, "I want to make you acquainted with Mr. Black, whose acquaintance I have only just made myself; but we have many interests and recollections in common, because of the fact that he has just returned from Alaska, also."

The two men just introduced shook hands, and Nick, having detected a significant look in the face of the miner, thought it well to humor him so far as to question the man to whom the miner had introduced him."

"When did you arrive in New York?" he asked him.

"Only a few days ago," was the response.

"And do you intend to remain, or are you going back again to the North?" the detective asked him, with the air of one who is not at all interested in the reply that might be made to the question.

"I don't think I will return to the North. The fact is, Mr. Carter, I was very ill while there, and am only too glad to get away from the country. I have come to New York on a personal quest of my own which interests me very deeply."

"Yes?" asked the detective, smiling vaguely.

"Yes; and just now, when Mr. Hawkins mentioned your name in introducing us, it brought to mind my purpose in coming here."

"Yes?" said the detective again, with a rising inflection.

The stranger hesitated a brief interval, and then, with a smile that was almost whimsical, announced:

"The truth is, sir, that I have determined to seek and find, and, if possible, to secure the services of a gentleman who bears the same name as yourself."

"Ah," said the detective; and he waited.

"Yes, again, Mr. Carter. The man I seek and wish to find is known as 'Nick Carter, the detective.'"

"Why do you wish to find him?" asked Nick.

"Because I have a very unusual and very interesting matter of my own to submit to him, if I can prevail upon him to listen to my story."

"I should think it would be easy enough to do that," said Nick.

The stranger shook his head.

"Perhaps not so easy as you would suppose," he replied. "I have my doubts if he would listen to me at all."

"And why?" asked the detective.

"Because from the very nature of it my story will appear preposterous. It even appears so to me sometimes when I think about it. I was just about to ask Mr. Hawkins if he could tell me where this Nick Carter is to be found, when he introduced me to you."

The detective was silent for a moment before he replied, and he recalled to mind the surprise and almost consternation expressed by Buck Hawkins when they had encountered this man in crossing the square, and now it seemed to the detective as if there might be something in the coincidence, that this man, who, according to Buck's idea, so strongly resembled Godfrey Chester, and who also had lately come from the Klondike.

He determined, therefore, to give Mr. Black an opportunity to call upon him and relate the story he had referred to as "preposterous," and, therefore, he said to him:

"I think I can provide you with the address of the person you seek, sir."

"I would be infinitely obliged if you would do so, Mr. Carter."

Nick took a blank card from his pocket and scribbled upon it the address of his own home, and, giving it into the hand of Black, he said:

"I think, if you will call at that address about eight o'clock this evening, you will find him there."

"You may be sure that I will do so, and I thank you very much indeed," was the courteous response.

They parted then, and the detective and the miner passed out of the hotel again, recrossing the square and going in the direction of Nick Carter's home.

"Well, Nick," said Hawkins, after they had crossed the avenue, "what do you think of it now?"

"What do I think of what, now?"

"Of the man who calls himself 'Black,' and who is as surely one or the other of those two cousins as I am sure enough Buck Hawkins."

The detective did not answer immediately, but, after a moment, he said:

"You must remember, Buck, that I have never seen either of those men, both of whom are supposed to be dead, and, therefore, I can only act upon your impressions."

The miner nodded.

"But I also know that you would not have been so positive and would not now appear to be so interested in this stranger were you not seriously impressed by the encounter. It was for that reason, Buck, that I gave him my address and practically invited him to call upon me this evening."

"There is another coincidence which perhaps escaped your notice, Nick," said Buck.

"What is that?"

"The coincidence of the name."

"What coincidence of the name? I don't understand you."

"This man calls himself 'Mr. Black,' 'Mr. Alexander Black.'"

"Yes," said Nick.

"Have you forgotten that one of the cousins, Godfrey Chester, in fact, was known in Arizona as 'Black Chet'?"

"No," said Nick, "I haven't."

"Well, then, isn't it likely that this man, if he should really be Godfrey Chester, and should have decided to assume a fictitious name—isn't it likely that under such circumstances he might have remembered the 'Black Chet' part of his career and have taken the name of 'Mr. Black'?"

The detective nodded.

"It isn't unlikely," he admitted. "But it will do us no good and will assist us none at all to conjecture upon the possibilities of the case until we have the story that he wishes to tell me."

Buck was silent again until they had almost reached the detective's home, and then, stopping abruptly in the street, he turned to the detective with a blaze in his eyes and conviction in his voice and said:

"I will tell you this much, Nick, and you can bank on it as being just about right; that man is Godfrey Chester, and I believe he is the original Godfrey Chester, and not his cousin, Chester Godfrey, whom I know; I believe it to be more than likely that in your talk with him when he calls upon you, you will unearth a greater mystery in this case than has yet been suggested. For my part, I believe that the case that we thought finished when you closed the one that you call 'A Mystery of the Klondike,' is only just begun."

"It may be true," said the detective, as they entered the house, "at least we will know what this man will have to tell us before we go to bed to-night."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN SEARCH OF HIMSELF.

Promptly at eight o'clock that evening, the door-bell of Nick Carter's house was rung, and a few moments later Joseph announced the name of "Mr. Black."

Nick and Buck Hawkins were seated together in the study at the time, and when the announcement was made the detective looked up with a smile and said:

"Our friend from Alaska is at least on time."

"Yes," said Buck; "and while we have been waiting here, I have been wondering if it is your purpose to permit me to be present at the interview."

The detective shook his head.

"I hardly think that would be quite proper, Buck," he replied; "and, moreover, I have always found that where a third party is present at an interview of the kind this is likely to be, it interferes very substantially with the freedom of speech of one or the other of the persons who are directly interested. Of course you must understand that your presence at this interview would please me personally, but I think it would place our friend Mr. Black under some restraint, and, therefore, I think you had better curb your curiosity and impatience until it is finished or at least until it is sufficiently advanced for me to summon you."

"But you will not forget, will you," said Buck earnestly, "that I am entirely convinced that this man is the original Godfrey Chester?"

"No, I will not forget it."

"Isn't it your opinion, Nick, that one of those cousins was an honest man while the other was a rogue?"

"Yes," said Nick, "that has always been my opinion."

"And that it was the rogue whom I met while on my way North a little more than four years ago?"

"Yes," said the detective again.

"And, therefore, if I am right in identifying this man who is waiting for you now, he is the one of the two whom I have never seen and whom his cousin was planning to murder at the time he made my acquaintance?"

"Yes," repeated the detective a third time.

"You see, Nick," said Buck, "there is in my consciousness at the present moment some intuitive reason which I can't explain, why I feel no grudge against this particular man who calls himself 'Mr. Black'—and whom I believe to be Godfrey Chester; while, on the other hand, the Chester Godfrey whom I knew, who tried to murder me, and who did succeed in depriving me of two years of life and memory, I hate. If that man is alive, Nick, and we ever succeed in finding him, you will discover that he believes this man to be dead, and you will find out also that my hate for him is such a violent thing that it will be almost more than I can do to keep my two hands off him."

The detective laughed, and replied:

"I already know enough of you, Buck, to believe that in this, as well as in other things, you will be guided by my advice."

Buck smiled grimly and nodded his head, and the detective arose to leave him.

"I will leave you here, Buck," he said; "and you can amuse yourself as you think best until I send for you to join us in the library or until I return to this room to tell you what has happened."

The detective found Mr. Black awaiting him in the library.

"He was standing by the center-table of the room with one hand resting upon it and in an attitude of eager expectation; and as soon as the detective entered the room, the stranger bowed with the air and bearing of a Chesterfield, or at least of one who was accustomed to genteel surroundings, and said:

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Carter, to consent to receive me as you have done, without in the least knowing why I asked for the interview; and I must say to you that when you gave me the card and address this afternoon, I was already convinced in my mind that you were the Nick Carter for whom I was seeking."

"Yes," said Nick, "I suspected that you did. A man of ordinary penetration could have gathered no less from what occurred. And now, sir, I am entirely at your disposal."

The stranger smiled somewhat whimsically, and remarked:

"I fear you will regard it as an extraordinary tale, Mr. Carter."

"I hear many such," replied the detective.

"But I doubt if you hear many such as mine, sir."

"Possibly not, Mr. Black."

"Mr. Carter, did you ever hear of a person who was literally in search of himself—of his own identity?"

The detective smiled broadly.

"That is not at all an uncommon situation in these days of mysteries," he said encouragingly. "It is not at all an uncommon thing nowadays for a man to lose his identity for weeks or months and sometimes years, at a time, and to go in search of it, often vainly."

The stranger smiled.

"It is true that I have read of such things," he said, "but it seems to me that I have never known of one within the space of my recollection, which you will presently understand to be very short indeed, where the mind of a man who had so lost himself, remained as clear in all other respects as mine is to-day, and has been for the past three or four months."

The detective raised his hand deprecatingly, and said:

"In order, Mr. Black, to relieve your mind of its present uncertainty, and to give you courage to tell your story to me exactly as it is, I will tell you that the gentleman whose acquaintance you made to-day and who a few moments later introduced you to me—he whom you know as

Mr. Hawkins, from Alaska—has met with and has passed through an experience almost precisely similar to the one you have suggested. Now, sir, if you will tell me your story, I am prepared to listen to it."

"My story is a very short one, Mr. Carter. Somehow, I have lost my identity; forgotten who I am; where I came from originally; who my friends may have been—in fact, sir, I have forgotten everything which in any way concerned me prior to a sort of awakening which came upon me only a few months ago."

"I understand you," said Nick.

"I shall describe what I shall call my 'return to semi-consciousness,' in as few words and as concisely as possible."

"If you please," said the detective.

"The case stands this way," said the supposed Mr. Black. "A few months ago I found myself living in a small Indian village in the far North and realized for the first time that I did not belong there. I discovered, also, to my utter astonishment and somewhat to my dismay, for it was inexplicable, that I could speak the language of the natives with whom I was living. I was dressed as they were in all respects save that I was white. I had somehow become one of them and one with them.

"You can imagine my consternation, when, after days of brooding over the mystery by which I was surrounded, I questioned closely one after another the natives with whom I was living, and discovered that I had been a member, or, rather, a protégé of their nomadic tribe for years. It was impossible for me to determine, from what they were able to tell me, just how long I had been there, but as nearly as I could estimate it, it covered a period of at least four years, and presumably more."

The detective nodded. "Go on," he said.

"I did not know who I was or how I had come to be one of them, and the only explanation they could give me was that I had wandered into their village in the springtime of one of their short Alaskan summers, speechless almost to the extent of being dumb; with a few rags clinging to me in lieu of clothing; emaciated—in fact, nothing but a rack of skin and bones.

"Those simple-minded people had regarded me with a sort of superstitious reverence; had taken me in; cared for me; nursed me, and sustained me, until, restored to bodily health, I had taken my place among them.

"I was told by them that I rapidly acquired their language, although I was never heard to use but very little of any other tongue. There was one chief among them who spoke English fairly well and he assured me that the only word that I had repeated many times was the name I have given to you, 'Black.'"

Again the detective nodded, and remained silent, and after a moment the stranger continued:

"I don't know, Mr. Carter, if that is my name, and I suppose it isn't; but it was the only clue I had to go upon and the only word which connected me with that past life of mine which was lost in mystery."

"Go on," said Nick. "I think it will develop presently that I understand the situation better than you do yourself."

"What condition of mind I could have been in during the months and years of my sojourn with those natives it is impossible for me to conjecture. The fact always stares me in the face that until the day of my so-called awakening, I had had no recollection whatever of the fact that I was not one of them."

"What was it that brought about this partial awakening?" asked the detective.

"That I do not know, sir."

"Did you receive any sudden shock or were you wounded or injured in any way at the time you partly came to yourself?"

"No, not that I am aware of."

"Let us go back still farther," said the detective. "Did those natives tell you that when you came among them so mysteriously, you had been injured about the head in any way?"

For reply, Mr. Black raised one hand to his head and pushed aside the half-flowing locks of black hair tinged with gray, from one side of his head, until he disclosed a livid scar along which the hair had refused to grow at all; and the detective bent forward to examine it.

"It looks to me," he said, "as if that were made by a blow from a heavy, blunt instrument like a club or a stone."

"Very possibly," said Mr. Black, "I know no more about it than you do."

"There can be no question," continued the detective, "that all the mystery by which you are now surrounded was caused by that blow."

"I think as you do about that, sir."

"Go on, Mr. Black," said the detective; "and tell me just what happened to you and what you did when you partly came to yourself."

"I remained more than a month with them while I strove to remember something of my past life. I spent days and weeks brooding over the mystery, trying to identify myself to myself. I discovered that the effort was utterly useless, was entirely without result and finally determined to leave them and return to civilization in the hope that some time I would come across a person who knew me and remembered me, and who could tell me who I really am."

"Did your recollection of the English language return to you with your partial awakening?"

"It did, as fluently as I possess it now."

"Go on, please."

"There is another remarkable circumstance which I

must relate to you before I go into the details of my departure from that place in the far North."

"Yes?" said the detective.

"During my stay with them I had guided those natives to the location of one of the richest placer mines that has ever been known in that territory. I need not explain to you that even in my imbecility I had insisted upon working that mine to a considerable extent; a mine where gold can almost literally be gathered up in shovelfuls at a time, and that those Indians, regarding me, as they did, with supernatural reverence, had religiously saved for me all those earnings, so that at the time I was prepared to leave them I was literally a rich man."

"You were fortunate," said the detective.

"Yes, indeed, sir. Having determined then to seek civilization, messengers were sent to procure me clothing and other necessities, and at last the day came when they guided me into the city of Nome and left me there.

"But, Mr. Carter, I wandered around the streets of Nome for weeks without encountering a pair of eyes in which I could discover the light of recognition. Chary of my story, fearing it would not be believed, I was reluctant, of course, to question others regarding my identity, but I did ask many questions of many people, nevertheless, obtaining, as you may have surmised, no result whatever. My gold, which the Indians had packed in for me, I changed for money, and now I am here."

"May I ask," inquired the detective, "why it was your impression to seek the city of New York, and why, having come here, you sought me out?"

"I did it because even in far-away Alaska your name is well known; I did it because I realized that I must have the services of some gifted person to aid me in my search for my own identity; and in inquiring concerning such a person, the name of Nick Carter was mentioned to me; and now, sir, I am here, and that is my story. I want to find out who I am—who I was before that accident happened to me which left me little better than a savage imbecile among a tribe of nomadic Indians in the far North. That, Mr. Carter, is my story."

CHAPTER III.

THE PUZZLE OF A LOST MEMORY.

"Does your presence in the city of New York revive any recollection whatever?" asked the detective after a considerable pause during which he had been thinking deeply.

"None whatever, save only this," replied the stranger; "I find that I know my way about perfectly well; but do not misunderstand me by supposing that if you were to ask me of the location of a certain place in the city, I could tell it to you."

"Then what do you mean?" asked the detective.

"This; that if I were to start now for any particular place in the city or for an aimless walk about it, I would discover as I advanced that the scenes and places were all familiar to me; that is to say, that I would know intuitively, as it would appear, where to go."

"I understand," said the detective.

"For example," continued Black, "when I arrived in the city, I went at once and practically without premeditation, although all the while I seemed to know where I was going, to the Fifth Avenue Hotel. When I entered it, the place seemed entirely familiar to me—even the face of one of the clerks."

"Did he recognize you?" asked Nick.

"That is another strange feature in the case. He recognized me without in the least knowing who I was; that is to say, he remembered my face and knew that I had been at the hotel before, but naturally enough he had no recollection of my name."

"It didn't occur to you to look over the old registers of the hotel?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! I paid a good, big tip to have them all brought to my room in order that I might search them."

"And you found nothing to suggest to you who you were?"

"Nothing at all."

"Was there no name there that struck you as being familiar?"

"Not one."

"May I ask if, during your search, you chanced upon the name of Godfrey Chester?"

Nick regarded the man earnestly while he asked this question, but the reply came instantly and without the least suggestion that the utterance of the name had recalled any remembrance of the past.

"I don't recall that I did so," Mr. Black said quietly.

"Was that the only man about the hotel of whom you have any recollection or who seemed to remember you at all?"

"Yes."

"But you were satisfied that you had been in New York before, perhaps often, and that at least the city has been familiar to you some time in the past?"

"I am perfectly satisfied of that," was the quiet response.

"I presume," said the detective, "that your reason for not seeking me out at once upon your arrival, here, was the hope that some recollection might return to you before you did so?"

"Precisely."

"I will ask you again, if you have any recollection at all, or if there is any suggestion to your mind whatever by the repetition of that name, Godfrey Chester?"

"It suggests nothing whatever to me, Mr. Carter."

"I will transpose it, then, and ask you if the name Chester Godfrey suggests anything to you?"

"No, sir; it doesn't."

"You have assumed the name of 'Mr. Black' because the word 'black' was the only one that your Indian friends could remember having heard you utter?"

"Yes."

"Do you recall that you ever heard of a man who was known as 'Black Chet'?"

The stranger smiled, shook his head and replied:

"No, I do not."

"Or 'Brown Chet'?"

"No."

"Is there anything suggestive to you in the mention of the name of the state of Arizona?"

"Arizona, Arizona," Black repeated in a musing tone after him. "It seems to me, Mr. Carter, that I should remember that, although in reality it suggests nothing to me."

"There is another name," said the detective, "which is associated with a case I have just finished; I will mention it to you."

"If you please, sir."

"The name is Vernon Harcourt—have you any recollection of ever having heard those words before?"

The man started perceptibly, his brows wrinkled, and an intense look came into his eyes—just such an expression as a person is likely to assume who is bringing every effort to recall something that has escaped the memory; and at last he replied:

"It affects me, Mr. Carter, somewhat the same as did the mention of 'Arizona,' although I believe this impression is rather more pronounced than that one was."

"Do you remember, Mr. Black, that you ever raised cattle anywhere in the West, or whether at any time you have ever lived upon a ranch?"

"I don't recall such an event."

"Has the name 'St. John, Arizona,' any suggestive quality to you?"

"Only that same vagueness of suggestion which the name of Arizona made to me before."

"Describe to me, as well as you can, what impression you received from my mention of the name of 'Vernon Harcourt.'"

"I don't know that I can do that; it is altogether too vague."

"Still there is an impression?" said the detective.

"Yes."

"Tell me what it is, as well as you can."

"It is only that I believe I have heard the name before, and that it may be associated somehow with my childhood or youth. The impression with me now is about the same as that of a dream which has remained so vaguely in the mind that it cannot be recalled save only as a suggestion."

"How old are you, Mr. Black?"

The stranger laughed outright at this, arose, and crossed the room until he faced the mirrorlike front of one of the bookcases.

"I don't know," he replied. "I can answer that question only as you would reply to it yourself if you were asked how old I am; that is, by judging from appearances. I should say that I was forty or thereabouts."

"Let us return once more to the name of Harcourt," pursued the detective.

"Very well, sir."

"I might as well admit, Mr. Black, that I already have some idea who you are, and if I am correct at all, you are right in surmising that the name of Harcourt was associated with your early life. Again, if I am right, that name belongs to a woman."

"But Vernon Harcourt sounds to me like the name of a man, Mr. Carter."

"Nevertheless, I happen to know that it was the name of a woman, and if you are the man I am inclined to believe you are, that woman became your wife, and Vernon Harcourt was her maiden name."

"I don't recall it, sir, save in that indistinct way that I have already described."

"Have you been entirely unable to recall anything that is connected with your first coming to Alaska?"

"I have tried, Mr. Carter, to mention everything of which I have the slightest recollection."

"Is there no recollection in your mind of any sort of family ties; of father, mother, brothers, sisters, and more particularly a cousin who might have been about your own age and may have borne a strong physical resemblance to you?"

"None."

"I will tell you a short story," said the detective slowly, "to which I wish you to pay close and particular attention. I want you to listen so that when I have finished with the story, you will be able to repeat it almost word for word if you are asked to do so."

"Very well."

"I have already referred, Mr. Black, to a case of mine which has just been brought to a conclusion."

"Yes."

"That case involved the history of two men who were cousins, or, to be more explicit, who were double cousins."

"May I ask what you mean by 'double cousins'?"

"Double cousins exist where the father of one and the mother of the other, and the mother of the one and the father of the other, or when the mothers of each and the fathers of each were own cousins."

"I understand, thank you; please go on."

"About eighteen years ago," continued the detective, "two men who were double cousins purchased a large ranch in Arizona at some distance from the city of St. John. The name of one of these cousins was Godfrey Chester; the other one was Chester Godfrey. These two men resembled each other very closely in height, figure,

features, and mannerisms, and even to some extent in the timbre of their voices. One of them—the first one I mentioned—had intensely black hair like your own before it began to turn gray; the other had brown hair; both had gray eyes. To distinguish them, one from the other, in the neighborhood of the ranch where they lived, one was known as 'Black Chet,' the other as 'Brown Chet.'

"A little more than eight years ago Black Chet went to Alaska to the gold-fields.

"He has never been heard from since save in an uncertain way; that he found valuable properties and became immensely rich.

"Four years later the other one, Brown Chet, sold out the ranch and stock and disappeared from Arizona. Nobody knew where he had gone or where he intended to go; but it has been thought since then, and I have reason to believe it to be true, that Brown Chet followed his cousin to Alaska and the Klondike."

"May I ask, Mr. Carter, how this story interests me?"

"It interests you, Mr. Black, because I have reason to suspect that you may be Godfrey Chester, in other words, the man who is known as 'Black Chet.'"

"And you know nothing of what became of Godfrey Chester?"

"Nothing is surely known. It is my own opinion that he disappeared immediately after he went there, or very soon after, and that now he has reappeared again in your person."

The stranger laughed again.

"It all sounds very interesting," he said, "but at the same time it appears rather preposterous. Did you know this man, Mr. Carter?"

"No, I have never seen either of them—unless you are the one who I am inclined to think you are."

"How, then, did you connect me with that one?"

"Through Mr. Buck Hawkins, who introduced me to you to-day."

"And may I ask how he makes the connection?"

"For the reason that he knew one of these men intimately, supposedly the one who was called 'Brown Chet,' and, therefore, when we passed you to-day in Madison Square, he was startled by your appearance, for he had at once supposed you to be the man he had known in Alaska and whom we both had supposed to be dead until that moment."

"Is that the reason why he spoke to me in the hotel?"

"It is."

"And am I to understand, Mr. Carter, that you were already interested in the case of Godfrey Chester, and that you saw in me, before I related my story, a possible solution of the mystery that still remains with it?"

"That is exactly the situation, Mr. Black."

"Then, Mr. Carter, let us suppose for a moment that I am Godfrey Chester, however are we to establish the truth to my own satisfaction?"

The detective smiled.

"I think there is a way," he said; "and only one way. If you are willing, we will undertake it at once."

"What is that way, Mr. Carter?"

"This; that you and Buck Hawkins and I will take the train to-morrow morning for Arizona. We will visit the ranch formerly owned in partnership between the cousins I have mentioned, and if the scenes about that place stir up any recollections whatever in your mind, it will be almost equivalent to proof positive to my mind at least that you are Godfrey Chester. The point is, are you willing to go there to make the effort?"

"I am willing, sir, to do anything which will help us to dispel this cloud which hangs over me."

"I have not yet quite finished the story I was telling you about those cousins," said the detective. "There is a little more which I wish to tell you and which I wish you to think upon between now and the time we arrive in Arizona, striving in the meantime to recall any suggestion it makes to you."

"Very good; I will do so."

"It appears," continued the detective, "from a letter which I have received in relation to that other case to which I have already referred several times, that those cousins who owned and operated the ranch in Arizona together, were, in fact, bitter enemies at heart. They hated or despised each other most cordially, but were apparently bound together by some oath or promise that had been made by them jointly to the woman whose name was Vernon Harcourt and who had become the wife of one of them. Something happened to nullify the effect of that oath or promise at the time of the departure of Godfrey Chester for the Klondike. That is all that I need tell to you about it now, save possibly this: there was a child, a daughter, of that union I have mentioned. I have reason to believe that she is now dead, or, at least, I know that one is dead who bore that name and who claimed to be that daughter. That is all of the story that you need to know now."

The man shook his head, and there was a troubled look in his eyes as he replied:

"Much as I regret it, Mr. Carter, the story you have told seems to recall nothing whatever to my mind."

"Let it go at that for the present," said Nick. "Return to your hotel now, pack your grip, and make ready for the journey to the West. We will leave on the Empire State Express in the morning."

CHAPTER IV.

THE 7-UP RANCH.

The interview just recorded had consumed only about an hour, but, nevertheless, when the detective rejoined Buck Hawkins in the study, he found the latter impa-

tiently engaged in pacing up and down the room awaiting him.

The detective dropped into his favorite chair, lighted a cigar, and remained for several moments lost in thought until Hawkins could bear the suspense no longer, and exclaimed:

"Well, for the land's sake, Nick, aren't you going to tell me what happened?"

"Nothing particular has happened," replied the detective. "It is another case almost precisely like your own, Buck."

"Loss of memory, eh?"

"Yes."

"Could he tell you why he assumed the name of 'Black'?"

"He assumed it because it was the one word of English that he used during the years that he lived with a nomadic tribe of Indians in the far North."

"Aren't you satisfied yourself that he is Black Chet?"

"Yes, Buck, I think I am."

"Has he no recollection of it?"

"None whatever, and nothing that refers in the least to his past life."

"Well, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to find out who he is?"

"We are going to start to-morrow morning for Arizona to visit the ranch where Black Chet and Brown Chet lived together so long."

"Is that all the case he seems to have in hand—the one to find out who he is?"

"Certainly," laughed the detective. "He must find out who he is before he can have any other case."

It will not be necessary here to describe the details of that journey to Arizona or to refer to any part of it at all until the moment of their arrival at St. John, from which place they intended to travel in the saddle to the ranch in question.

Nick had already instructed his client to observe closely everything he saw, and to inform him at once of any suggestion of recollection the scenes he was about to encounter might make to him.

The detective had little hope that there would now be found any one in St. John to recognize Godfrey Chester, who had already been absent from that locality for more than eight years.

At least, he did not intend to seek for such a person until after they had visited the ranch and returned from it; but he was not without the hope that during their passage through St. John, and their journey to the ranch, they might encounter some person who might recognize Black Chet in this man who accompanied him and who would make that recognition known by some spontaneous act or word.

They arrived late in the afternoon, and Nick at once arranged for horses and a guide to take them to the ranch; the result was that they started out at dawn of the following day.

As they rode along the trail, the detective noticed that the man who had so thoroughly lost himself, kept glancing from side to side ahead of him and around him, with the eager look of one who recalls something that is only vaguely familiar, and they had not been in the saddle three hours before he turned to the detective and said, with decision:

"I have traveled this trail before, Mr. Carter. I know that much, at least."

The detective nodded, and made no reply, and it was not until they halted for a short rest in the middle of the day that Black resumed the subject.

Then he pointed to the westward where a spiral column of dust was whirling across the plain, and remarked:

"Those dust columns are as familiar to me as if I had lived with them always. I know I have seen thousands of them before. What does it mean?"

"It means," said Nick, smiling, "that your memory is returning by easy stages. I have great hopes of you, Mr. Black."

They did not arrive at the ranch until the close of the following day; but when they passed over a rise of ground and came in sight of it, Mr. Black pulled his horse up sharply, and, with trembling hand extended, pointed toward it.

"I have been here before," he said. "The whole scene is perfectly familiar to me."

"I thought it would be," replied the detective.

For a moment Black studied the scene before him, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he said:

"It sounds like folly for me to say so, but it seems to me there is one building missing from that group we see before us. I can count but eight, and there should be nine."

"Good!" laughed Nick. "You are improving. When we arrive, as we soon shall, we will discover if you are right about that."

When they drew up in front of the ranch-house, a Mexican vaquero came out to greet them, and asked glibly enough in Spanish if they would dismount and accept the hospitality of the place.

Black, to his own amazement and to Nick's surprise, responded instantly in the same tongue—and then a curious and interesting thing happened.

The Mexican until that instant had paid no particular attention to any one of them. He had regarded them, doubtless, until that moment, as merely a group of travelers who wished to put up at the ranch for the night, but now as the glib response was made to him in his own tongue and spoken perfectly and with the assurance of long habit as well, he turned suddenly so that he faced Nick Carter's client, staring into his eyes.

For a moment he remained as if he were suddenly be-

prived of the power of speech and motion, and then, without a word, he wheeled upon his heel and reentered the house, leaving Nick and his companions gazing after him in surprised astonishment.

"I wonder what's eatin' that fellow," said Buck gruffly. "He was all politeness when he came out here to receive us and until——"

Buck ceased suddenly, and leaned over toward the detective and added:

"I'll bet a million, Nick, that the greaser recognized Godfrey Chester in our friend, Black. The only puzzle to me is why he should run away like that, even if he did so."

Nick had dismounted and thrown his bridle-rein to the ground, and had already taken a few steps toward the house; but now he turned and replied to the miner:

"I think you are right, Buck, and I think he turned away as he did in order to tell some one else of his discovery."

But now two other Mexicans appeared and at once busied themselves with uncinching the horses and leading them away in the direction of the corral, and, a moment later, the man who had first greeted them reappeared in the doorway.

"Enter, caballeros!" he exclaimed, with a smile, this time speaking in very good English. "You are quite welcome to our poor hospitality, I assure you."

He made no mention whatever of his strange actions of the moment before, but led them into a big, cool room into which, a moment later, food and drink were brought to them; and it came so quickly after their entrance into the room, that it appeared almost as if the Mexican had left them originally to order it.

In all cattle countries ranches are rarely, almost never, referred to by the name of their owners. It is the brand which is placed upon the cattle which inevitably gives the land its name, and this one was known only as the 7-Up.

It was for that reason that it had not occurred to the detective before leaving St. John to inquire the name of the man who owned the 7-Up outfit, so now he turned to the Mexican, who remained near them to wait upon them, and asked in Spanish:

"Who owns the 7-Up now?"

"I have that honor, señor," the Mexican replied suavely. "The ranch is now mine, and has been for some years. My name, señor, is Diego Morales. *La su dispiociones señor.*"

"Thank you," said Nick. "Might I ask from whom you purchased it? I am making something about the early history of this place."

"The former owner, the man from whom I purchased it, was called Chester Godfrey. I was employed by him when he owned it."

"Ah!" said Nick. "I know, then, that you knew him very well indeed."

"*Si, señor;* very well indeed."

"May I ask how long he has been gone from here?"

"More than four years, señor."

"Do you know where he went when he left here?"

"I only know that he went away; no more than that."

"And has he never returned?"

Nick was watching the Mexican intently, while he asked this question, and he saw, or fancied he saw, something akin to a start of surprise in the man's manner; but the answer came quickly and glibly enough.

"No, señor. He has never returned."

Nick turned, and, with a gesture, indicated the man whom we know as Black, and continued:

"May I ask, Señor Morales, if you have ever seen this gentleman before?"

The Mexican shook his head emphatically, and replied:

"Not to my recollection, señor."

"Does he not resemble your former employer?"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture of deprecation with his hands, palms outward, and replied:

"It is possible, señor, that there may be a resemblance, but I had not noticed it until you mentioned it. May I ask if you were acquainted with my former employer, Señor Chester?"

He had turned the tables very cleverly, but Nick replied coolly:

"I know a cousin of his, that is all."

"The señor has forgotten to mention his name and the names of his friends," the Mexican insinuated presently, and Nick replied at once:

"My name is Carter, this is Mr. Hawkins, and this gentleman is Mr. Black."

There was no further mention of the subject nearest to the hearts of our three friends after that until their meal was disposed of and they had stepped outside into the cooler air of approaching evening, and then the detective drew Hawkins aside and said to him quietly:

"Buck, I have got a strange idea, which is nothing more than a conjecture based upon the merest guesswork. I want you to know, when I tell you what it is, that there is no foundation in logic for it or in fact."

"Go on," said Buck.

"Very well; since the strange conduct of that Mexican, Morales, upon our arrival, I have somehow formed a suspicion in my mind that Chester Godfrey, the man who is known as Brown Chet, is not only alive, but is at

this moment somewhere inside this ranch-house, and, if that is so, strange things will develop before we have been here very long."

CHAPTER V.

THE VICTIM OF A LARIAT.

Night fell soon after our travelers arrived at the ranch, but, nevertheless, the detective found an opportunity to leave his friends together while he walked off alone through the starlight, to have an opportunity to think things over a bit.

A man in search of his own identity was a novel thing under any circumstances, but when that man proved to be—as Nick was now satisfied he was—a person who was directly associated with another case, and for whom uncounted millions in money were waiting when he had succeeded in proving his identity, the situation not only became unusually interesting, but decidedly complicated.

The detective recalled to himself now, in substance, the salient facts of that other case which had been entered in his books under the name of "A Mystery From the Klondike."

He remembered that he had received three letters in connection with that case: One from Buck Bradshaw; one from the young woman who had signed herself as Vernon Harcourt, and who had announced herself as the daughter of Godfrey Chester; and the third one had come from a man who in the letter claimed to be Godfrey Chester himself, but who had later proved to be a crook-gambler from the Klondike who had personated Chester, who had taken wrongful possession of his millions, and who, at the last, being caught red-handed, had confessed to the murder of the man he represented himself to be.

But here was also another complication.

Earl Morgan—the gambler in question—had evidently not attacked the real Godfrey Chester, but his cousin; the one who was Chester Godfrey. It was Chester Godfrey who had attacked his own cousin, Godfrey Chester.

Stated succinctly, and recalling the old case, it was as follows:

The cousins had first lived on a ranch in Arizona. Godfrey Chester was "Black Chet" and Chester Godfrey had been "Brown Chet." The two hated each other. Black Chet had sold out his interest in the ranch to Brown Chet, eight years ago, and had gone to the Klondike where he had "struck it rich." Four years later Brown Chet had somehow learned of the success of his cousin, and had followed him to the gold-fields. Up there, somewhere in the solitudes of the North, Brown Chet had attacked his cousin and supposed that he had killed him.

"Now," said the detective, "let me put myself in his place—in the place of Brown Chet, and determine what I would have done under the same circumstances in which he was placed.

"Having attacked Black Chet, and, believing that I had killed him, I would have remembered the strong personal resemblance I bore to him, and would have darkened my hair at once so that in case I encountered any person who had known him in the North, I would be mistaken for him.

"After that I would have returned to the States, to this ranch, to arrange my affairs so that they might be left to care for themselves indefinitely, after which I would have returned to the North again in order to possess myself of the property there; and, that done—— But I am getting ahead of my story.

"On that return to the North Brown Chet met and made the acquaintance of Buck Hawkins on board the steamer; he induced Buck to become his partner, realizing that Buck was an old miner, and believing that he could murder him easily when he had made sufficient use of him.

"I happen to know that this is exactly what he attempted to do, for all that is in the other case. I *know* that Brown Chet attempted to murder Buck, and that he did succeed in injuring him so that he remained an imbecile for more than two years; *but here we have the remarkable circumstance that Brown Chet served two men in exactly the same way, and that in each case the result of it was very nearly the same.*

"I know that Buck Hawkins was deprived of his mental capacity and of his memory for two years as the result of Brown Chet's effort to kill him—*and now it is almost certain that the attack upon his cousin, some months earlier, was productive of the very same results.*

"And now to come down to the gambler's connection with these affairs, I have only to recall some things that he said to me: That he suspected that Brown Chet was not exactly what he appeared to be; that he wormed more or less of his story out of him, and, by adding to that what he already knew, he decided that *he* could put Brown Chet out of the way and then possess himself of all the

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vast wealth that had been discovered by Black Chet and was afterward stolen by Brown Chet.

"In that case, Bad Morgan regarded it as a case of a thief stealing from a thief; and in order to make his theft good, in order that he might enjoy all the millions without the risk of discovery and its results, he calmly set about to murder Brown Chet.

"Now, I do not know, and I have no way of determining, whether Brown Chet escaped Morgan, or not. It is certain that Morgan believes that he killed him, and, believing that, he boldly came to New York posing as Godfrey Chester.

"But Morgan had never heard of the existence of a child of either of the men whom he believed to be dead, and so, when after his arrival in the city he became aware of the existence of Vernon Harcourt, he was half-paralyzed with fear, *for he did not know and could not know that Vernon Harcourt had never seen her father within her recollection, and, therefore, knew no more about him than a total stranger could have known; but it rattled him so that he wrote the letter to me—and so that he committed another crime—the murder of Vernon Harcourt herself.*

"And now, if this Mr. Black *is* Godfrey Chester—in other words, Black Chet, which seems to be the case, his loss of memory and with it the loss of his identity can be traced back to the attack of his cousin upon him, just as Buck Hawkins' loss of memory and identity for a space of two years was the result of the very same circumstance; and we have the remarkable spectacle of the original owner having returned to claim his own as soon as his identity can be established.

"And here again, at this ranch, if I am to rely upon my intuitive reasoning, and to add two and two together as suggested to me by the conduct of the Mexican, I am to conclude that Brown Chet, the cousin who attempted these murders, is at this very moment in hiding within this very house.

"But then, I must ask myself the question: Why should he deem it necessary to hide at all? And I find the answer at once—a very simple answer, indeed, *for it must be that this man here—if he is here—has heard of the return of Godfrey Chester to New York and did not even suspect that the man was another impostor; did not doubt that his cousin, Black Chet, had come to life to denounce him, well, accordingly, he fled to this place to hide himself away.*

"That looks to me as if it were a partial solution of this complicated situation. It almost takes the prize for a Chinese puzzle, too.

"But what else can I conclude from the demeanor of that Mexican?

"When he saw us ride up to the place, he came out to meet us, the personification of hospitality, but when he caught a glimpse of the man we call Black, he saw at once the resemblance between him and the man who is hiding here, and he dashed inside the house to give the necessary warning; and the man inside the house believes, of course, that we have for some reason suspected that he is alive, and have come here to make trouble for him.

"As I understand it, that is the situation at the present moment.

"Diego Morales poses as the owner of this ranch, while in reality he is only the majordomo of the place, and the owner of the ranch, Brown Chet, otherwise Chester Godfrey, is here hiding, awaiting a suitable opportunity to attack his cousin a second time, probably, in order to possess himself again of the great wealth that is his.

"If only memory would suddenly return to Godfrey Chester, how simple the rest of the case would be; but everything of the past is as blank to him now as if he had no past at all, but had been born up there in the North a full-grown man."

The detective believed that he had now argued the case out in his own mind, down to the present moment, and he turned to retrace his steps to the ranch-house, when he saw Buck approaching him through the starlight.

"Why did you follow me out, Buck?" he asked, as soon as the miner joined him.

"Well, Nick, I felt as if I wanted to talk this business over with you a leetle."

"Yes? What about, in particular?"

"I have been thinking over what you said about the possibility of the other cousin being alive, as well as the one we brought here with us."

"Yes?"

"We heard Morgan say that he killed Brown Chet, didn't we?"

"We did."

"Well, how, then, do you figure out that he is alive—and here in this place?"

The detective related in detail how he had figured it out.

"Well," said the miner at the conclusion, "if you are correct about all that, this here ranch ain't a very safe place for our friend 'Mr. Black' to be foolin' around, is it?"

"It is decidedly unsafe for him, Buck."

"And by the same token, for you and me as well; eh?"

"I suppose so, although I hadn't thought of that as yet."

"I hadn't given it much thought myself, if anybody should ask you; but since I went back into the house after what you said, I have been keepin' what you would call a furtive eye on that greaser."

"What is the result of having watched him, Buck?"

"I can't say that there is any specific result, Nick; only that the fellow never takes his eyes off'n our Mr. Black, when he thinks he is unobserved. He watches him as a cat watches a mouse, and it occurred to me that the Mexican is figuring out some way to 'do' him."

"I should not wonder in the least if he were, old fellow."

"We don't want to let anything of that sort happen, do we, Nick?"

"Most certainly not. For example, I don't think you should have come out of the house now, and so have left Black alone with the Mexican."

"I didn't suppose that they would dare to attempt any funny business quite so soon. I have figured it out that if there is any of that to be done, they will wait till night, or till after we start to leave here to-morrow—that is if we do start to leave here to-morrow, and that, of course, is what the Mexican supposes we will do."

The detective nodded. The two had turned and approached the house while they were talking, and now they were quite close to it; and now Nick said to the miner:

"Go along inside alone, Buck, and leave me here. I wish to reconnoiter a little farther."

"All right. How long will you be?"

"Only a few minutes."

As soon as the detective was left alone he glided swiftly along the wall of the building toward a shuttered window which he knew would look in upon the room where they had all been seated; and as he drew near and pulled aside the shutter so that he could peer inside, he saw Buck Hawkins enter the room by the doorway that communicated with the wide hall that ran through the house.

He saw also that "Mr. Black" was not in the room and that Buck discovered the fact as soon as he entered it and closed the door after him.

But the Mexican, Morales, was there, standing near the empty fireplace with one elbow resting upon the shelf above it, and with his eyes fixed steadily upon the door through which Buck entered; and there was a crafty smile upon the handsome face of the Mexican, too, as if he had just accomplished something that pleased him immensely.

Nick saw Hawkins pause abruptly and heard him demand, in no gentle voice:

"I say, Morales, where is my friend Mr. Black? Why is he not here?"

"He was tired, señor," was the calm reply, delivered smilingly. "He craved the privilege of retiring. He has only just gone to his room. Will you be pleased to follow him, señor?"

"You bet your life I'll be pleased to follow him, Morales. I will thank you to right about face instanter, and to conduct me to him without delay. I don't like this——"

Buck got no further than that in what he was about to say, for at that instant a second door, that was almost directly behind him, opened softly; a shadow appeared in it, and then while Nick Carter watched the proceeding through the window, and before he could do anything at all to prevent it, the noose of a lariat was dropped over the miner's head, and Buck was jerked backward through the door, which was instantly closed.

CHAPTER VI.

A MEXICAN ENIGMA.

Had there been a possible opportunity to have done so, the detective would have fired his pistol through the window in defense of Buck Hawkins.

But the scene had taken place so quickly and so unexpectedly, the door behind the miner had opened so suddenly and Buck had been drawn through it with the rope so expertly that he was gone, and the door was closed behind him, and Diego Morales was left the sole occupant of that room, before even the detective, with his keen appreciation of incidents, could realize what was taking place.

His first impulse then was to dash into the house by the way that Buck had taken, to burst into the room where the miner had been captured and to have it out

then and there with the silent and motionless and sneering Morales, who remained immovably leaning upon the shelf before the empty fireplace, as if the incident that had just happened before his eyes had entirely escaped his notice.

This was one of the times, however, when the detective did not act upon his first impulse. For the very appearance of the Mexican suggested that he was waiting there for the appearance of Nick Carter, having doubtless planned for his capture in the same manner that Buck Hawkins had been taken.

Forewarned is forearmed.

For a few minutes the detective remained motionless where he was, gazing past the partly open shutter into the room while he studied the situation and determined what course he should pursue.

And all this time the Mexican did not move save to roll a cigarette lazily and light it; then he smoked on calmly and imperturbably while he waited, as Nick Carter had no reason to doubt, for the appearance of the detective.

There were three doors which communicated with that room: they were the one by which Buck had entered it; that one through which he had been lassoed, and another which Nick remembered to be the one through which their supper had been brought to them a little while ago.

Never reluctant to face danger in any form when it was at all necessary to do so, the detective finally determined to walk carelessly into the room and to act as if he were entirely unconscious of the fact that any danger existed.

He knew that upon entering that he could step to the right quickly and so remain facing the two remaining doors and also with the one through which he would enter sufficiently in view so that it could not be opened without his knowledge.

Having prepared himself for whatever might happen by getting his weapons in such a position that he could use them instantly, although they would not be seen, he turned back to the front door, passed through the hallway quietly, and in another moment stepped swiftly into the room where Buck had been captured and where Morales still leaned against the shelf with that sneering smile of self-complacency upon his handsome face.

The detective confidently expected that one of the other doors would open immediately after he entered the room from the hallway. But they remained closed and no sound came to Nick from beyond them to suggest that enemies were lying in wait behind them.

He did precisely as he planned to do. That is, he stepped out to the right so that he approached the window through which he had lately been peering, and partly turned aside so that he could see plainly every door of that room.

The Mexican raised his eyes lazily and smiled at the detective; and he said:

"I trust, señor, that you have enjoyed the evening air outside."

"Quite so," replied Nick curtly. "Where are my friends?"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulder with his usual deprecating gesture.

"The one whom you call El Señor Negro—Mr. Black, I believe it is—expressed a wish to retire soon after you went out. He was shown to his room, and is there now, I have no doubt."

"And the other one?" asked Nick, still speaking curtly and standing so that he was prepared for anything that might happen.

The Mexican repeated the shrug and the gesture, and smiled broadly.

"He came in but a moment ago," he said. "You must have seen him outside, señor."

"I did."

"He did precisely what you did when you entered the room, señor; that is, he asked at once for his friend. I informed him that Mr. Black had gone to his room, whereupon Señor Hawkins expressed a desire to follow him. He was taken, señor, to the room at present occupied by Mr. Black."

There was a meaning smile upon the Mexican's face as he said this, which informed Nick as plainly as words could have done that both men had already been concealed in some room of that great house where they were bound and helpless and doubtless under guard.

He realized that he was now alone in the midst of enemies who would not hesitate to murder him if it were deemed necessary and if they could succeed in doing so; and, truth to tell, he wondered a little why they did not attempt it at once, since already Black and Hawkins had been captured, and if they were to be put out of the way, it followed that the detective must be subjected to the same fate.

However, there was nothing at all menacing about the

attitude of the Mexican. He remained coolly in his position near the fireplace and seemed disposed by his manner to be genial and cordial and entertaining.

The detective knew that, upon a ranch of the size and character of this one, many men were employed, and he had no doubt that a man like Diego Morales would have been exceedingly careful in the selection of his employees in order that he might be able to depend upon them in any emergency that might arise.

It is true that he had so far seen only two of them about the place, but he had no doubt there were twenty at least, and that at this moment many of them, if not all of them, were waiting somewhere near-by for the sound of a signal which Morales was to make use of if he wanted them.

Under the circumstances, the knock-down and break-down method was not to be thought of, and could be productive of nothing but disaster to the friends of the detective and himself.

It was a situation in which discretion was certainly the better part of valor, and where Nick believed that his best chance existed in his maintaining the outward appearance of being entirely unsuspicious that anything had happened.

Wishing to appear entirely at ease until he could determine precisely what it would be best to do, he drew a chair toward him from the table and placed it with its back almost against the wall between the windows; then he dropped, with apparent negligence, upon it, thrusting out his feet and assuming a position which was as comfortable as it could be made to appear, while he retained his alert demeanor and his perfect readiness to defend himself at any instant.

To his surprise, the moment he had taken his seat, the Mexican left the fireplace, passed around to the opposite side of the table, and seated himself there while he lighted his fingers with the rolling of another cigarette.

"Do not you also wish to retire, señor?" he asked, with his cold smile, showing his gleaming teeth.

"Not yet, thank you," replied the detective.

"Not to seek your friends who have already gone to their rooms?"

"Not yet," repeated Nick.

"That you are not concerned about them or their safety, señor?"

"Why should I be?"

The Mexican indulged in one of his shrugs, and said:

"There is no reason why you should be so, but only a moment ago when the taller of your two friends came in he manifested some alarm because the other one had retired. It was as if this was a house of bandits and we were in the habit of ill-treating our guests, who are always welcome here, and to whom we always extend the hospitality of the rancho."

Nick did not regard this statement as calling for any reply whatever, so he made none; and the Mexican, after a pause, continued:

"Did not you indicate to me, señor, soon after your arrival here, that you wished to make some inquiries about the former owner of this ranch?"

"I think I may have given that impression," said Nick.

"And was it about the one from whom I purchased it?"

"Presumably."

"He whose name was Chester Godfrey?"

"Yes, and who was known locally about here as 'Brown Chet.'"

"May I presume to inquire what you desire to know regarding him, señor?"

"I wish to learn something about his probable fate after he left here."

"And may I further presume by inquiring what reason you may have for desiring to ascertain the fate of Señor Chester?"

The detective was not prepared for this question, and yet, in a measure, he was so. He had thought it more than likely that he would be met with such an inquiry, but it had never occurred to him that it would come from such a source. However, he had already determined upon a reply, and now he made it:

"Some time ago," he said, "I received a letter from a person who claimed to be a near relative of the two gentlemen who formerly lived here together; they were cousins, I believe; that person had made extensive search and had failed to find a trace of either of them. That, I think, Morales, is an answer to your question."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders, and was for a moment silent, and then, with a faint smile in his eyes, he said:

"I suppose it ought to be a sufficient answer, and ought, therefore, to satisfy me, but for some reason, it does not. We will, however, pass that, if you please, Señor Carter, and touch upon another subject which has interested me deeply since your arrival."

"Yes?" inquired the detective. "What is that?"

"You may have noticed," pursued Morales, "that at the time of your appearance here I was somewhat startled when I looked into the face of your Mr. Black. Do you wish me to explain why his appearance affected me?"

The detective laughed aloud. He had suddenly determined upon a bold move, in words at least, and he adopted it.

"I already know the answer," he said. "It was because of the likeness you saw in him to one or both of your former employers."

"Have I said that I was formerly employed by one of those men?"

"No, you haven't. But I don't doubt that you were. What you may tell me is why the likeness startled you and also why, upon perceiving it, you wheeled and reentered the house in order to consult with some person here whom I have not yet seen."

The Mexican's eyes gleamed for an instant, but the calm smile never left his face as he asked:

"Was it your opinion, señor, that I did that?"

"It certainly was," responded the detective.

"May I ask, then, if the gentleman who startled me is really named Mr. Black, or is that a name he has perhaps assumed for the time being only?"

"He recognizes no other name than Mr. Black," responded the detective evasively.

"You gentlemen are all from New York?" the Mexican asked, after another short pause.

"Yes."

"And you, yourself? Are you not the famous detective who is named Carter?"

"I am a detective, yes."

"And may I now inquire further, señor, if you are not here on official business?"

"I rarely travel, Morales, unless it is on official business."

"My questions may surprise you, but in a moment I will explain my reasons for asking them. As you have surmised, I have lived on this ranch a long time and have been employed by both of the gentlemen who were known respectively as Black Chet and Brown Chet, and now, if I may, I will ask one more question."

"Very well."

"Have you not heard of the presence in New York City of Mr. Godfrey Chester himself?"

The detective smiled broadly and nodded his head.

"Yes, I have," he admitted.

"Still one more question, señor; a pointed one this time. Is not the gentleman who came with you, whom you call Mr. Black—is he not in reality Godfrey Chester?"

Nick nodded, still smiling, and replied coolly:

"I think, Don Diego, that I may admit to you that the gentleman in question is Godfrey Chester."

"Good!" said the Mexican, and he left his chair hastily then as the door through which Buck Hawkins had been lassoed was pushed open, causing Nick Carter to leap to his feet and to prepare for the struggle which he believed was likely to follow.

CHAPTER VII.

AN IMPOSTOR UNMASKED.

Nick Carter did not even have occasion to draw a weapon when he was startled by the suddenly opened door, and after one glance and then a smile at the person who entered through it he dropped back again upon his chair, selected a cigar from his pocket, and calmly lighted it.

The man who entered at the door was apparently Mr. Black himself, who was said to have already retired.

It is certain that the detective had no doubt that it was Black returned to him, and he was for a moment intensely surprised, because, as we know, he had believed until that moment that Black and Hawkins were both helpless prisoners in some other part of the building.

It did not occur to Nick at the moment that this man near the doorway, approaching him, might not be the same one who had accompanied him from the East; he forgot for the moment that he had already admitted to himself his belief that Brown Chet was concealed somewhere within the house, and he forgot also the existence of the remarkable likeness between the cousins which had so often been described to him.

Until the opening of the door and the sudden appearance of the man through it, Nick had believed that Morales was only fencing for time in order to perfect his arrangements for capturing him as he had done the others, and, as we know, he had been on the alert every instant in expectation of an attack from some quarter.

But as the man advanced across the floor toward the detective he made a laughing remark which brought an

indistinct suspicion into Nick's mind and put him at once keenly upon the alert; for he said:

"Ah, Carter, you see I have returned; I suppose you were told I had retired."

There was nothing at all in the face or motion of this person to suggest to Nick Carter that he was not the man who had accompanied him from New York, nor was there anything in the color of his hair to indicate it; the voices were almost exactly alike.

But there was, nevertheless, a difference in the manner of speaking which was at once evident to Nick, and that, taken in connection with the fact that Black had never addressed him merely as "Carter," but always as "Mr. Carter," it was sufficient to give rise to the suspicions already mentioned.

At once Nick believed that he saw through the entire scheme that had been begun by the capture of Black, and instantly he became convinced in his own mind that his idea concerning the presence of Brown Chet in that house was correct.

He knew now, or thought he knew, that the man who had just entered the room was not Black, but Chester Godfrey, who had planned this little transposition scene since their arrival at the ranch.

He looked at the man more intently now, while he pulled a chair from under the table beside the Mexican, and sat himself upon it; and in that instant he resolved that he would allow them to play the game out to a considerable extent in the belief that they had hoodwinked him while he made use of the opportunity to study their methods thoroughly.

What he could not understand at the moment was they had thought it necessary to make a captive of Buck Hawkins as well as of Black; but he had no doubt there was a good reason for the move, and that it would appear later.

"Did you change your mind?" asked Nick, in reply to the remark that had been made to him.

"Yes, I found that I was not so fatigued as I thought. You know, Carter, that when we first arrived, it seemed to me just like coming home again after all these years of absence. Everything about the place is so familiar to me and is fraught with memories of the past——"

Nick interrupted him by laughing outright, and he continued to laugh for quite a minute, for here, without any effort on his part, was an absolute admission by this man that he was not what he appeared to be, and, furthermore, that he had not thought it necessary to post himself very thoroughly before undertaking to practise the imposition.

"Yes," said Nick presently, "I remember that on the way out here you were deeply interested in the thought of seeing your old home again."

There was so much irony in the tone in which Nick made this statement that the man at the opposite side of the table glanced quickly and furtively toward the Mexican beside him, as if he would inquire of that individual if there could be a meaning behind the remark which was not apparent.

But Nick Carter's face was as serious and placid as a summer day, and outwardly he gave no sign at all of the confirmation of the suspicion he had entertained.

"Where did you leave Buck, Mr. Black?" he asked, after a moment.

"Oh, he has turned in, Carter; and, by the way, while you and Buck were outside I had an opportunity for a little chat with Morales here, who remembered me, after all, although at first I suppose he did not, and, therefore, it will be unnecessary for you to address me any longer as 'Mr. Black.' Let me be my old self again."

"Good!" said Nick, laughing. "This is excellent."

"Morales has even consented to sell the ranch back to me again," said the man, who evidently wished Nick Carter to recognize in him the original Godfrey Chester.

"Yes?" replied Nick inquiringly.

"I have decided to buy it, Carter, and to leave Morales here as the manager; and that reminds me that to-morrow, if you are willing to accompany me, I would like to ride out to inspect the herds."

"Certainly," said Nick. "Anything more?"

"For the present, no."

"Don't you think," asked Nick, intending to lead him on to further damaging admissions, "that we had better adhere to our original plan about returning to New York?"

But the fellow was not to be caught napping this time for he answered evasively:

"I will not decide until to-morrow."

The detective now turned squarely toward Morales and said quickly:

"Your questions, señor, while we were alone here, would appear, in the light of what has developed, to have been quite unnecessary, since you had already talked with Mr. Chester."

The Mexican laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and then, without replying at all in words, he left his chair and passed quickly out of the room at the door through which the impostor had entered it, thus leaving Nick Carter and the disguised Chester Godfrey face to face with each other across the table, and alone.

"Where is Buck Hawkins?" asked Nick abruptly, and as he spoke he drew one of his pistols from his pocket and laid it quietly on the table in front of him without having taken his hand from the butt of it or his finger from the trigger.

And the man at the opposite side of the table paled perceptibly when he saw this act.

He started to his feet; he, too, would leave his chair and escape from the room as the Mexican had done; but the quiet voice of the detective arrested him so that he sank back again into his former attitude, although not at all at his ease as he had been before.

"I would advise you to remain seated where you are—Mr. Black," said Nick quietly. "You and I have some weighty matters to discuss right here and now."

"Yes?" responded Brown Chet, making a heroic attempt to appear at ease. "I seemed to have forgotten them."

"I doubt," said Nick. "If you have ever even known about them."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, Mr. Chester Godfrey—keep your seat, sir, and do not attempt to move if you value your life. I hold thirteen trumps at the present moment, and I may feel the inclination to play them all at once—I mean, Mr. Chester Godfrey, otherwise Brown Chet, otherwise twice a would-be murderer and many times a thief—I mean that the man who attempts to make a fool of me in the clumsy manner you have done it, succeeds only in making one of him-elf."

"Really, Carter——"

"Mr. Carter, if you please," interrupted Nick, with some malice in his tone. "You have studied your part so poorly that you don't even approach the character of Mr. Black as I have known him. Your appearance is all right, and your motions and your mannerisms, even your voice are perfect, but you have neglected the important point of informing yourself concerning the relations that have existed between your cousin and me until now, and you have also, somehow, missed the fact that the wound you inflicted upon your cousin, when you attempted to murder him, destroyed his memory so that even at this moment he has no idea that he is Godfrey Chester."

The utter amazement which swept across the face of Brown Chet was sufficiently reassuring to the detective, had he needed any further confirmation of his supicions.

For a moment the former sat very still staring at the detective, and then, as if he perceived that a further attempt at deception was useless, he laughed harshly and boldly took the other course.

"Very well," he said, "have it as you please, Nick Carter. I know well enough who you are, although we have never met before. I am Chester Godfrey, who was known formerly as 'Brown Chet,' and I have attempted to impose upon you just now by impersonating my cousin who came here with you. It is not the first time I have impersonated him, either. I have dyed my hair for so long a time now, that it seems quite natural even to me. But now, Nick Carter, that you know the truth; now that you know who I am; now that you evidently appreciate the fact that my cousin is already a hopeless prisoner as well as a helpless one, and that I mean to play out this game to the bitter end, regardless of who or what stands in the way—now that you realize all this, what are you going to do about it?"

"I have not quite determined that, as yet," replied Nick coolly.

"Why did you come here at all and bring my cousin with you?"

"We came here," said Nick, "believing that a sight of the ranch might restore his memory to him."

"Do you mean that you told me the truth when you said just now that he has forgotten? That he doesn't know who he is?"

"He has not known since you tried to murder him, and did not succeed."

"We'll drop that, if you please, Mr. Carter, and I might suggest that you needn't forget that, although you have your hand upon your pistol and your finger upon the trigger, and, therefore, have got the drop on me, you are, nevertheless, entirely in my power, and I have but to utter a signal to bring twenty men through those doors into this room instantly."

Nick laughed in a low tone and shrugged his shoulders.

"And I might remind you, Brown Chet, that if you

utter that signal, you will be the first dead man in the fight that will follow it. If you attempt to raise your finger to your lips or if you utter a sound of any kind that can be heard beyond these doors, I will kill you as I would a snake. Put your hands on the table in front of you, and keep them there until I give you permission to remove them."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EASY WAY INTO A TRAP.

For a full minute the desperado at the opposite side of the table remained speechlessly staring at the detective across it; but he did not neglect to obey the imperative order the detective had given him about placing his hands upon the table in front of him.

There was no indication of fear in the man's eyes; only a suggestion of crafty cunning; only an intense longing that he might somehow be given an opportunity to exercise it.

He stared at Nick unwinkingly, almost unseeingly, and it occurred to the detective then that in all probability he was expecting the return, at any moment, of the Mexican.

"Well," asked the detective, "do you think that you quite comprehended what I said to you, Brown Chet?"

"You spoke plainly enough," replied the man, with a sneer. "I understand the English language. I am puzzled, though, about one thing you have said to me—puzzled because I believe you have lied."

"I never lie," returned the detective, with quiet emphasis.

"Bah! Everybody lies these days. I wish you would tell me why you insist that my cousin has lost his memory."

"Because it is true."

"When did he lose it?"

"I have told you that twice already. He has not regained it since you tried to kill him."

"How do you know that I tried to kill him?"

"It doesn't matter how I know it. It is sufficient that I do know it."

"And you say he has not known who he is since that time?"

"Yes."

"Do you realize that it is over four years since that time?"

"Approximately, yes."

"But he has known who he is since then."

"On the contrary, he has not."

"He has at least been living in New York City under his own name lately."

"He has not."

"What?"

"I speak the truth."

"Somebody has done so."

"Yes."

"Who, then, has done it?"

"A certain man who once tried to kill you, and who thought he had succeeded."

"Do you mean Bad Morgan?"

"Yes."

"Was it he who lived in New York as Godfrey Chester, posing as a millionaire, and all that? Do you mean to tell me that it was he who did that while all the time I have been supposing that my cousin had somehow recovered from his wounds and was there?"

"Yes."

"Furies! If I had but known it!"

"Exactly—if you had but known it you would not have been in hiding here, would you? You would not have been hibernating here while you tried to think up some scheme to again put yourself in the place of your cousin?"

Chester did not reply. A crafty expression came into his eyes while the detective watched him narrowly, all the time expecting that he was on the point of making some desperate attempt to escape from his present predicament.

But it appeared that that was not what he was thinking about at all. Instead, he was trying to study out the character of the detective, and measuring him by his own character, he believed, as others had done at other times, that Nick Carter could be bribed.

"Carter," he said presently, and a cunning smile crept into his face, "have you any idea of the amount of the wealth my cousin owns?"

"No."

"Don't you know that it amounts to many millions?"

"I have heard him referred to as a billionaire, if that is what you mean."

"It is what I mean."

"Well, what about it?"

"I don't suppose you are a very rich man, are you, Carter?"

The detective smiled; then he replied:

"I have managed to accumulate quite a fortune. Why?"

"The man has never lived who had enough money to satisfy him, has he? I suppose you call a few hundred thousand dollars quite a fortune, don't you?"

"It would be an immense fortune to some people I know," replied the detective.

"And to you?"

"Never mind me, if you please."

"But that is exactly what I do wish to mind. I want to make a proposition to you, Carter."

"Oh! Do you?"

"Yes. Will you listen to it?"

"Possibly I can tell you what it is already, Chester."

"Well, what is it, then?"

"You wish to offer me a million or two out of your cousin's wealth on condition that I will help you play your game out to the end so that you may possess yourself of it; eh?"

"Exactly. That is just what I wish to do. If you will help me, I will give you——"

He paused, and Nick waited.

"I will give you," he continued, "a million dollars in cash."

"That is rather a small offer, isn't it?" asked the detective mildly; "small, isn't it, considering the size of the fortune?"

"A million ought to satisfy you, Carter."

"But a million would not satisfy me; I tell you that plainly."

"Two millions, then."

"Nor that, either."

"Great Scott, what do you think you are going to get? The whole fortune?"

"I don't want that, either."

"Look here, Carter, if you will come into camp with me and help me out in this thing, I will give you three millions in cash out of the fortune. Wait, now, don't answer me till I have finished. It's as easy as living on a farm. You have brought my cousin to me here, instead of compelling me to go in search of him elsewhere. People at St. John saw you ride out this way with him, and knew that you were coming here, while, on the other hand, there is not a soul in this region who suspects that I am here."

"What of that?"

"This: Think how easy it would be for me to ride back with you representing myself as the same man who came here with you. I am supposed to be dead, you know."

Nick nodded.

"What is to become of your cousin in such a case?" asked the detective.

"Morales will take care of him."

"You mean that Diego Morales will murder him in cold blood?"

"I mean that I shall ask no question concerning what becomes of him."

"You contemptible scoundrel! And you do have the effrontery to sit there calmly and propose such a hideous thing to me, supposing for a moment that I would entertain it? Do you reckon up the character of every man by your own?"

"I have never yet known a man who wouldn't sell his soul for money—if there was enough of it," said Chester, with a sneer.

"Well, you see one now."

"I haven't offered you enough, that is all; but I have offered you all that I shall."

The detective regarded him for a moment with narrowed eyes, and then abruptly he left his chair and walked around the table until he was near to Chester.

"Stand up, Brown Chet!" he ordered, then.

"What for? What do you wish me to do?"

"Stand up, I tell you, or I will hurt you. Stand up!"

"Well, here I am; what now," he rose and stood beside his chair, facing the detective, who still held the pistol in his right hand.

"Turn around," ordered the detective again.

Chester did not move.

"Turn around, Brown Chet!" the detective said again, and this time so menacingly that the fellow complied at once; and then, no sooner was his back turned than Nick raised his right foot and administered a solid kick against that part of him which had been next to the chair, and so sent him sprawling against the mantletrel at the opposite side of the room.

"Good!" exclaimed the detective, while Chester was falling. "I feel better now."

But for all that, Nick Carter had not reckoned upon the opportunity this act would afford Chester for getting

his hand to his lips, and, therefore, of uttering the signal which would summon assistance to him. Nick had momentarily forgotten that, and Chester made the most of the forgetfulness.

He had even been in the act of raising his hand to his mouth at the instant when Nick kicked him, but the shock had thrown him forward so quickly that he was not enabled to give utterance to the whistle until after he struck the floor.

But then he did so almost instantly.

The detective had barely given utterance to the expression mentioned above, when the wild, shrill whistle rang out, and so fiercely was it given that it seemed to pierce walls and doors so that it might have been heard, Nick thought, almost as far away as the corral.

The instant that Nick heard the first note of that signal, he realized that only a few seconds could elapse before there would be a rush of men toward that room, and he would be surrounded and set upon by more than he could hope to overcome single-handed, notwithstanding his great strength.

From somewhere in the distance he heard an answering signal; but already he had leaped forward, and before Chester had succeeded in struggling to his feet, Nick dealt him a blow behind the ear with his fist which stretched him senseless upon the floor.

Already he could hear footsteps approaching along the wide hallway toward the room, and he knew that escape was impossible in that direction; but he turned at once and sprang to the opposite side of the room, this time selecting the door that had not been used that night save for the purpose of bringing through it the food that had been served to them.

He passed through it and closed it after him just as the opposite door was burst open and men rushed into the room; but they were too late to discover by which door the detective had departed.

For just one instant Nick paused outside the door to listen. He heard their exclamations of dismay uttered in Spanish, when they found their employer senseless on the floor; and then, remembering that he carried his flash-light in his pocket, he produced it and flashed its glare along the corridor in which he found himself.

It was narrow, and there were stairs at the far end of it—stairs that led upward into the darkness, and which he instantly guessed might take him toward the place where Buck and the real Godfrey Chester were imprisoned—that is if they had not already met with the fate which Nick had no doubt was intended for them ultimately, and for himself as well.

He ran toward the stairs and sprang up them three steps at a time just as the door behind him was thrown open and half a dozen of the men rushed out into the corridor in pursuit.

And he knew that they had seen him, too, or, at least, suspected where he had gone, for he heard one of them call to the others in Spanish:

"The stairs! The stairs! Go around the other way, some of you, and head him off! We have him in a trap now."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET PASSAGEWAY.

It must be remembered that Nick Carter knew absolutely nothing about the plan of the interior of that ranch-house.

When he escaped from the room, after knocking down Brown Chet, he ran up the stairway that he found in the corridor only because it was his idea that by doing so he stood a better chance of discovering the place of temporary imprisonment to which Buck Hawkins and the real Godfrey Chester had been taken.

And again believing at the instant that he had time to reach the top of the stairway before he would be discovered, he thought it less likely that his pursuers would search for him there than through the lower part of the house; it would be natural that they should expect him to escape from the house altogether, under the circumstances.

But as we know, he was seen and followed by his pursuers before he was half-way to the second floor.

He heard their shouts of warning, directing those others, whoever they might be, to go around in order to intercept him, and he realized that he must make some sort of stand at the top of the narrow stairway, for otherwise there was every chance that he would soon be surrounded by such overwhelming numbers that there would be little chance for him to escape.

In the upper hallway, quite near the top of the stairs, stood an old glass-knobbed bureau of mahogany, and, therefore, an exceedingly heavy article of furniture; and it should be stated right here that the stairway itself was boxed in half-way down from the top.

By the time Nick reached the second floor, two of his pursuers were already swinging themselves around at the foot of the stairs, and he could hear the tread of many feet behind them, denoting that there were several others who had also taken up the chase.

It is true that he might have used his revolvers and so have killed or wounded several of them, at least, but Nick Carter never resorted to such extremes unless it was absolutely necessary that he should do so, and there was no other possible way for him to escape.

He knew already that he had pulled his electric flash-light from his pocket, and by its aid was enabled to see his way; and he flashed it again at the top of the stairs, thus discovering the existence of the antique bureau.

With quick decision he dropped the flash-light into his pocket, and, exerting all his strength, he seized the bureau, wheeled it around to the edge of the top of the stairway, and then, at the very instant the three or four of his pursuers were dashing up it, he took the bureau and threw it with all his force directly down the stairway against them.

He could see that it struck the foremost of the men fairly, hurling him backward against the others, and then the bureau itself cut off further opportunity for observation; but he smiled grimly in the darkness when he realized that the heavy piece of furniture had become tightly wedged in the passage of the stairway, thus effectually blocking the further approach of his enemies, from that quarter, at least.

He knew then that for a few moments pursuit was cut off from that direction, although he did not for an instant forget the warning shouts he had heard directing others to ascend to the second floor by some other route.

Again he drew his flash-light and threw the brilliant illumination it gave forth quickly around the space in which he stood, which proved to be a large room rather than the hallway or entry; and he discovered that almost in front of him at the opposite side of this room was one door made of heavy diagonal planking, which was held in place by a bar of oak that had been fastened across it. The thought came to him that here, without doubt, was the prison-room of his friends, for it must be remembered that a man will think quickly and even with exceeding clearness when involved in a predicament such as Nick Carter faced at that moment.

The stairway was blocked, and he knew that his pursuers could not ascend by it, and he also knew that if there were any other way to reach that floor from the ground it would require hours for them to break their way through the barrier he had accidentally but fortunately erected.

Two or three quick leaps took him to the door already mentioned, and in a moment he had removed the bar and had pulled the door open so that he could enter the room beyond.

Again his flash-light came into play, and he discovered that he had not been mistaken in his surmise.

The room was absolutely devoid of furniture of any kind, but in opposite corners of it, stretched upon blankets that had been thrown down for their accommodation, tightly bound and gagged, were Buck Hawkins and the man to whom we will now refer only as Godfrey Chester.

The eyes of the two men were wide open, showing that they were perfectly conscious of their surroundings, and that thus far they had been uninjured; it was evident to Nick in that moment that crafty Brown Chet and his villainous companion, the Mexican, had not the time or, perhaps, the inclination to take the lives of their two prisoners until Nick Carter had also been captured.

To leap to the side of first one and then the other and to sever with the keen blade of his knife the bonds that that held them, were acts that were accomplished more quickly than they can be told here; but so stiffened and cramped were the two men by the results of their experiences and by the tightness of their bonds which had retarded circulation, that the detective was obliged to assist them to their feet where they stood for a moment tottering and uncertain of their activity. It only required a moment, however, for all of Buck Hawkin's vigorous energy to return to him, and Godfrey Chester recovered his powers almost as quickly.

The readers of Nick Carter's history will remember that whenever the detective started out on an adventure which was likely to be fraught with danger and which might possibly result in personal combat, he was never without his full equipment of weapons, and it will doubtless be remembered that in such cases he inevitably carried a small weapon in either coat-sleeve where they were held by spiral springs in such a manner that he could throw them almost instantly into his grasp when he desired to do so.

So, now, remembering that he had those two [illegible] in his sleeves, he pressed one of the remaining two into the

grasp of Buck Hawkins while he gave the other one to Chester.

"Don't do any killing unless you have to," he said quickly, "but use them if you must. Are you all right now, Buck?"

"Yes," was the instant reply.

"And you, sir?" he asked again, addressing Chester.

"I am, Mr. Carter, and I also want to tell you that my memory has returned to me; I know who I am, thank Heaven!"

"Good!" said the detective.

"It was the sight of my cousin that restored my memory to me," said Chester rapidly, "and now tell me what we are to do."

"Fight, I reckon," replied the detective grimly. "We have at least twenty men against us and already they have swarmed into the lower floor of this house like so many bees with their stings all ready to use. Hark!"

It was not necessary to hark, however, for the percussion of heavy blows and the sound of splintering wood came to them from beyond the doorway through which Nick Carter had entered the room.

There was another door to that room, however, opposite the one already mentioned, but when Nick attempted to open it, he found that it was barred, or at least fastened, at the opposite side, so that his efforts were futile: but the flashing of his light over it revealed the fact that there were iron brackets on the door as well as at either side of it into which a bar might be slipped so that it could be fastened from this side as well as from the other; and it required but an instant for him to secure the bar that he had thrown down on entering the room and to place it across the other door.

Just as he had succeeded in accomplishing this it became evident that the flashing of his light in the room had been seen through the two windows from the outside, for instantly there were several sharp reports and as many bullets came crashing into the room through the windows and buried themselves in the woodwork and ceiling.

"I reckon, Nick, that we're rather up against it," remarked Buck, with his lazy drawl. "You have sure stirred up a hornets' nest this time, and, as you said a minute ago, their stingers are all out ready for use."

Another volley of bullets crashed through the windows at this instant, one of which grazed Buck Hawkins' ear so that it bled as if a hot iron had touched it.

"Come on," said the detective, "we must get out of this," and he led the way quickly into the other room, from which opened the stairway down which he had thrown the heavy bureau.

The detective had just begun to think it was rather strange that none of their pursuers had attempted to approach them by that other way he had heard suggested, when a further assault upon the door which he had barred in the room they had just left told him that he had succeeded in temporarily cutting off their approach in either direction.

There were three or four doors from the room at the top of the stairs, and having thrown his light around, Nick darted toward one of them, opened it, glanced through and called for his friends to follow; and here he found himself in a room which ran the length of the building, and believing that this offered as good an opportunity for escape as any other one might, he ran through it to the opposite end closely followed by his friends.

The door that they found at the end gave into a large room which was rather sumptuously appointed and which the detective at once guessed was the private quarters of Brown Chet; but the moment they had entered it and closed the door behind them, Godfrey Chester exclaimed:

"This was once my own room! I know where I am now perfectly well and I remember thoroughly, everything. If you will let me guide you, Mr. Carter——"

"Guide us!" exclaimed Nick. "That is exactly what I wish you to do if you can——"

"I can, if you will tell me what you would like to do," said Chester.

The detective had been glancing around him by the aid of his light during this interval, and he was surprised to discover that there were no other visible means of entering or leaving this particular room save the one by which they had entered it, and he replied:

"I see no way of getting out of this room, Chester, unless we go back by the way we came."

"Oh, yes, there is. I will show you," was the quick reply. "Will you let me have that light of yours?"

Nick passed it over to him with the remark:

"You may keep it and make use of it, as you are to act as our guide; now lead on, as I want to get out of here as quickly as possible. Wait a moment, however, before you start, for there is one thing that you should understand."

"Yes?"

"It is that your cousin intends to murder you and all of us if he can get the opportunity to do so, and that every man Jack among his followers is a good shot, like himself."

"I understand that perfectly well, Mr. Carter," was the quick reply.

He stepped forward across the room and pulled aside a heavy curtain which hung from the ceiling to the floor, thus revealing another door, which was set snugly into the wall and which had no perceptible lock or hinges.

But beside it, at a little distance from it, Chester removed a square block of wood from the ceiled wall and, passing his hand into this aperture, he pulled upon a stout cord he found there, upon which the door already referred to glided noiselessly aside, revealing a narrow stairway which led downward.

In a moment more, our three friends had passed through it, closing the door behind them.

CHAPTER X.

THE FLIGHT FROM THE CORRAL.

"Where does this take us?" asked Nick of their guide, who was directly in front of him.

"Into the front hall through which you entered the house when you came here," was the quick reply.

"All right," said the detective. "When we get there I will ask you to step aside, Chester, and let me take the lead; after that you may follow and do as nearly as possible what I do."

When they came out into the lower hall they could hear the tramping of many feet over their heads, and the blows of axes still resounded from two directions, indicating that the men who were pursuing them were not only attempting to smash the mahogany bureau, but were also using every effort to break down the door that Nick had barred from the inside up-stairs.

The ground floor of the building appeared to be deserted. There was not a person in sight, and it was evident that every man in the outfit was either at one of the two places already described, where the axes were in use, or was among those others who had gathered outside the building to shoot through the windows and to head off any attempt at escape through them.

For a moment Nick halted there at the foot of the narrow stairs, and he said to Chester:

"Where will we find the corral to which our horses have been taken?"

"A hundred rods from here, in that direction," replied Chester, pointing with his finger.

"In that case," said Nick, "we will have to fight our way across it in the moonlight. There is a pretty good chance of some of us being wounded in doing so, so get your guns ready and we will make a dash for it; but wait a moment first."

He leaped across the hall and darted into the room where the scene had occurred between him and Morales, and where, later, he had knocked Brown Chet senseless with his fist.

Although considerable space has been taken in describing what had occurred since Nick had delivered that telling blow, only a very few moments really had elapsed, for it will be remembered that after knocking Brown Chet down Nick had run up the stairs, had thrown the bureau into the stairway, had entered a room and released his friends, after which the course already described had been followed. It is doubtful, therefore, if more than ten minutes of actual time had passed.

It is therefore not surprising that Brown Chet was only just recovering from the effects of the blow he had received when Nick Carter opened the door of that room and appeared in it. His men had picked him up from the floor and put him on a couch at one side of the room, and now, as Nick discovered him, Brown Chet was sitting on the edge of the couch with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands and was still in a half-dazed condition.

We all know perfectly well the extraordinary strength possessed by Nick Carter.

He saw in the presence of this man here a shield which would protect them in their short dash across the open ground between the ranch-house and the corral, and, without an instant's hesitation, the detective sprang forward, dealt the fellow another blow, not as severe as the first one he had received, and then, as he was falling, caught him in his arms and dashed away through the opening into the hall and thus to the rear door of the building, which he directed Hawkins to open.

For an instant only they gazed outside to get their bearings and to discover what they might have to contend with, but fortunately the way was clear before them and there was not a man in sight.

"Now," ordered the detective, "huddle close to me and we will make a run for it. I fancy the others who were outside have entered the house, also, and it may be that we can reach the corral without a shot being fired."

They waited for just one instant longer and then, with a cautious word of command, the detective started forward on a run across the open space, carrying his prisoner swung across his shoulder and closely followed by his two friends.

And they had succeeded in covering rather more than half the distance before they were discovered, and then a volley of shots from one of the upper windows of the house was sent after them, and Buck Hawkins pitched forward upon his face on the ground as a result of it.

Instantly, Nick threw down his burden and, regardless of the bullets that were now flying around them, raised the huge and heavy body of his friend in his arms, and, without waiting to ascertain how severely Buck might be hurt, started on again while he called out to Chester:

"Don't stop! Keep on!"

And so they succeeded in reaching the corral and passing inside of it without further injury to any of them, although the storm of bullets had pursued them every step of the way.

But once inside of the corral with the gate closed, they were temporarily safe, at least, and here the detective had an opportunity to discover how severely Buck Hawkins was injured.

Even as he bent over his friend, whom he had stretched on the ground on his back, the miner opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the detective.

"Where is it, Buck? Where are you hit?" asked Nick.

"It is my right leg," was the instant reply, "I guess it's not very bad; let me up." But the detective insisted on his lying still until he had searched for the wound and found it, and then, as he threw off his own coat and vest and tore off his shirt to obtain material with which to bind the wound, he called out to Chester:

"Get three horses saddled if you can, and then be ready to open the big gate. We must leave here inside of five minutes; and when we do it, we must stampede this entire bunch of horses."

By the time the bandage was applied to the wound, Nick had resumed his coat and waistcoat, the horses were ready and Chester had brought them to the spot where Buck was lying.

Then with the same ease as if Hawkins was a half-grown lad, Nick lifted him upon one of the saddles and asked:

"Can you ride, Buck?"

"You bet your life I can ride! That wound is only a scratch."

The big gate of the corral was at the side of it opposite from the one by which they had entered from the ranch-house.

Already the murmur of shouts and the rush of feet was heard crossing the space between the house and the corral, which the pursuers were approaching, and Nick realized that now there was not an instant to lose if they would make good their escape.

"How about that gate?" he asked Chester, as he leaped into the saddle himself.

"I can open it in an instant," was the reply.

"Do so. Throw it wide open; then return here. We will mount here where we are and then I want each of you to aid me with shouts, and pistol-shots in the air, to drive every horse out of this corral and to keep them going ahead of us just as long as we can. Bend low in your saddles, both of you, and make for that butte that I saw last night directly to the southward."

Then at the moment when Chester returned to them, having carried out the orders he had received, a pounding at the small gate which Nick had fastened on the inside, told them that their pursuers were already there.

But Nick paid no attention to them, for he knew that two or three minutes must elapse before they could succeed in breaking through, for the corral was what is known as a "stockade," and the gate was a heavy one.

With a shout to the others that he was ready, they fired their revolvers into the air, at the same time yelling with all their strength, and thoroughly frightening the fifty or sixty horses that were in the corral; and while Buck held the center, Nick and Chester rode to either side, bunching the horses toward the big gate, which Chester had opened, and presently driving them through it on a wild run.

And so they dashed out into the open and away, with the drove of horses careering in front of them and with the sound of volley after volley of pistol-shots behind them, while bullets whistled and whined past their ears and over their heads; and Nick Carter's only regret at this moment was that through force of circumstances he had been obliged to leave Brown Otter behind him.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

The act of stampeding the horses from the corral had of course deprived the enemy of the means of immediate pursuit, and our three friends were not long in putting sufficient distance between themselves and Brown Chet's men so that the bullets fell harmlessly and hopelessly in the rear.

For it was not the first time that Nick Carter had met with an experience of this kind, and he knew perfectly well how to follow up a herd in that manner and keep it moving.

As for the other, Buck Hawkins had been a cowboy all his life before he became a miner, and Godfrey Chester, as we know, had passed a great part of his life on a ranch.

When they were at a safe distance from 7-Up Ranch—or rather from the ranch-house and the corral, the detective slowed up and called his friends to draw nearer to him.

"I think we may permit the horses we are driving to go where they will now," he said. "At the very best, it will be many hours before the men from the ranch can round-up enough of the animals to pursue us; and by that time we will be so far on our way to St. John that we need not fear pursuit. Let us ride along slowly now, and give our horses as easy a time as possible, so that in case we should have to use them they will be in fair condition to make a run for it."

They pulled their steeds down to a walk, and after that rode along side by side, quietly, and without a trace about them of the exciting incidents they had just encountered, save the absence of an outer shirt from Nick Carter's body, and the six-shooter-leg of Buck Hawkins' costume, through which the bandage showed plainly enough.

"How is that wound getting on, Buck?" the detective asked him.

"Oh, that's all right. I have had many a worse one. I think the bullet hit a nerve and so paralyzed me for a moment. I know that the bone isn't injured."

"The bullet isn't in the wound, anyhow," said Nick. "Now, Mr. Chester, will you tell me just how and when your memory returned to you?"

"Hadn't I better go back to the moment when I was attacked?" he asked in reply.

"Yes."

"You know you had gone out—to have a smoke alone, you said."

"Yes."

"After a little while Hawkins followed you out. You probably know that. Well, he had been gone only a moment when three men, whom I had not seen before, entered the room where the Mexican, Morales, remained with me; and I had noticed that Morales was regarding me strangely all the time.

"When the other men came into the room, I remember that Morales made some excuse to pass behind me, and of course suspecting nothing, I permitted him to do so. If I had then been in possession of my senses, as I am now, I would not have allowed it."

"Certainly not."

"Suddenly I was seized from behind and pulled backward to the floor, chair and all, and at the same time the other three leaped forward upon me and held me down while Morales tied me up with a riata.

"At first I attempted to struggle, but I soon discovered that it was utterly useless to do so and I desisted. And then, when I was thoroughly bound and helpless, they lifted me between them and carried me to that room that had formerly been mine. You remember it?"

"Yes."

"All this time Morales had been chuckling and talking in Spanish at the same time; but I understood everything that he said, of course, for I used to talk Spanish as well as English. And all the time he kept calling me Godfrey Chester and Black Chet. He laughed at me because he thought I had supposed I could fool them about my identity. He jeered at me for attempting to palm myself off upon them as Mr. Black—and at last they carried me into that old room of mine where I noticed that a man was seated in a deep, easy chair in the corner; a man who rose and came forward as we entered.

"I was thrown unceremoniously upon the bed, and then that man I had noticed came near and stood over me, looking down upon me with a cruel smile on his face—*and instantly I remembered him.*

"Memory returned to me, Mr. Carter, with something of the same effect that one would see through a doorway that had suddenly been thrown open to him. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"It was the sight of Chet's face.

"'You thought you could fool me, did you?' he asked me; and then he cursed me horribly and ended by striking

me with the flat of his hand across my cheek. If I had needed anything more to supply me with memories of the past, that act clinched it. In a flood everything of the past returned to me precisely as if I had never forgotten at all. If you can tell me just why that is so, you will do well."

"It is a psychological question which I will not pretend to answer," replied the detective. "What happened after that?"

"Chet turned to the others when he had done that and ordered them to bind me more securely and to gag me, and then to take me to the 'strong room'; for that is the name we have always called the room where you found Buck and me."

"Well?"

"That is all. You know the rest. After a while Buck was brought in, bound and gagged like myself, so that, when they left us alone together, we could not exchange confidences—and then after a long time we heard a crashing sound outside the door, after which you burst into the room."

"And now," asked the detective, "what do you propose to do next?"

"Nothing more than to get back to New York as soon as I can. I must establish my identity and then return North as quickly as possible in order to recover my property."

"How much do you know about that property of yours, Mr. Chester?"

"I know that I have properties worth millions, in the Klondike; I know that I had already organized a syndicate to take charge of it and work it, at the time Chet stunned me and left me with three of my men, to freeze, bound and gagged and fastened to a rock in the far North. And I remember now that I escaped, although recollection is rather hazy as to how I did it. I only recall the fact that my three men were dead when I did escape, and that I wandered away through the cold of a Northern winter night and at last fell in with the Indians who sheltered me and cared for me. I remember that I fell into a ravine somewhere, and hurt myself terribly. It was then, I suppose, that I lost all sense of my identity. Chet Hopkins returned to the place where he had left me bound to the rock, some time in the future, and finding heaps of bones there, supposed that I had died with the others."

"Do you believe now that you will have any difficulty in establishing your identity, up there in the North, where your property is situated?"

"None whatever. I have proofs of everything; many proofs about which Chet did not know. They are cached up there, in a secret place. I will be all right, Mr. Carter."

"Do you realize that much of your wealth has been transferred to New York? That a gambler named Bad Morgan——"

"Yes. I recall all that you have told me about Morgan. But I will have to go to the North first, in order to reestablish myself."

"There is a mansion, there are moneys in bank, and there——"

"Yes. I know, Mr. Carter. But even if I should never recover any of that—and I am more or less indifferent about it—there is still enough left in the North to render me one of the richest men in the world."

"What about this ranch down here?"

"It belongs to Chet. Let him have it."

"Do you mean to say that you intend to leave him without seeking any redress for all the agony he has made you suffer?"

"I mean that I shall never voluntarily look into his face again. I would rather forget that he lives at all. I do not think that he will attempt to pursue me any farther."

"Well, I do. You will never be safe for a moment as long as that man has his freedom."

Godfrey Chester shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

"I even think that he and his men will pursue us now, as soon as they can gather their horses to do so," insisted the detective.

"Let them, then. My only desire now is to get away from here. I hate this place and everything that is associated with it."

"Do you remember what I told you about Vernon Harcourt?"

"Yes."

"There is something about it which I did not tell you. She claimed to be the daughter of one of you—you or your cousin, you know—and at the time she was murdered by Morgan I had her body embalmed. It is in a vault where we can obtain access to it, and the time is so short since she was killed that it ought to be perfectly preserved. You will wish to see it, will you not?"

"No, Mr. Carter. I am sorry that she was killed, of course; but I had never seen her since she was a mere child—and there are things associated with her history, and the history of her mother, which I do not care to recall. It is better that she is dead, I think."

"She was your daughter?" asked Nick.

"Yes; will you pardon me if I ask that we change the subject? It is a painful one to me. I wish to forget it all."

"Very well," said the detective. "It does not concern me, of course. Morgan is now awaiting trial for her murder."

* * * * * * *

We need not dwell upon the remainder of their journey to St. John. They traveled slowly, keeping an eye out for evidences that they were followed, but saw none; and in due course of time they rode into the town and to the hotel where they had left their baggage.

But they were destined for yet another meeting with Brown Chet, for just before they arrived in front of the hotel they came face to face with three other horsemen who were leaving it and who had spurred their horses, riding rapidly toward them.

A glance told the detective that they were Brown Chet, Diego Morales, and another of the outfit from the 7-Up Ranch.

The discovery was mutual on both sides at the same time, and Nick Carter saw Brown Chet raise his pistol, while, with a curse on his lips, he pointed it at Godfrey Chester.

And then the detective performed one of those wonderful snap shots for which he is famous. He threw his right hand forward and a revolver appeared in it as if by magic. The flash and the report followed with the same instant and the gun in Brown Chet's hand was sent spinning into the air, knocked out of his grasp by the detective's bullet.

Morales had also raised his gun, but now that he believed his chief to be hit, he turned tail and fled, closely followed by his companion.

Brown Chet, however, was not for giving up the struggle so easily, and although his right hand was benumbed by the shock of having his pistol knocked from his grasp, he spurred his horse forward, attempting to draw a second weapon as he did so.

But it stuck in his holster for some reason, and he was beyond reach of his friends before he could use it, and then, evidently realizing that the time had come for him to make his escape, he put spurs to his horse and dashed away down the street.

But already Nick had turned in pursuit of him, and in doing so he had taken the lariat from the pommel of his saddle—the rope that had been attached to it when Chester helped himself to the saddles in the corral.

And Nick, with a swing of his arm, cast the rope so that it fell squarely over the shoulders of the fleeing man and pulled him from the saddle to the ground with a crash.

Several men had rushed forward by this time, so that it was quite a group that formed around the fallen man by the time Nick had dismounted and gone to him; and here, also, Godfrey Chester wormed his way through the group and joined him.

Brown Chet looked up at them with sullen eyes and twitching mouth.

"Do your worst, now that you've got me!" he muttered; and Nick, instead of answering, turned to Godfrey Chester.

"What shall we do with him?" he asked.

"Put him on his horse and let him go," was the instant reply.

"I am afraid you will be sorry for it if you do that," said the detective.

"Nevertheless, I prefer to let him go free, if you are willing, Mr. Carter."

Nick shrugged his shoulders and half-turned away; then he said:

"Do as you please, Mr. Chester; but you will regret it, I fear." Then he turned again to Brown Chet and added:

"It is your cousin's desire that you go free, and so you may go. But I wish to give you one word of warning. It is this: If you ever show your face in New York and I know it, I will see to it on my own account that you are made to answer for your crimes."

They watched the man while he mounted and rode sullenly out of town, and then they continued on their way to the hotel.

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY—No. 555—will be entitled "The Mystery-Man of the 7-Up Ranch; or, Nick Carter Against the Brown Chet Outfit." It will deal, as may be supposed from the title, with the future efforts of Brown Chet to injure his cousin and obtain his great fortune.

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Some time ago I wrote you a letter and received an answer by mail.

Your advice to give up all idea of becoming a detective is undoubtedly good, for the person who would give up on account of disappointment has no business as a detective, as it must be full of discouragements. I naturally turn to you in this line, as I like the NICK CARTER the best of all the weekly magazines.

It is true that not any one who might choose could be a good detective; but my father and family, *i.e.*, his brothers, were inclined that way, and one of the two of my brothers also, although that quality was never wholly developed.

I had decided to, and tried, to give up the idea; but it comes back to me with full force, and it is the only subject on which I can concentrate my whole mind and energies; the only literature of which I never tire.

Now what would you advise me to do and how to begin, whatever it is? Am farming at present. Awaiting your reply, I remain, yours very truly, R. H. F. B.

Lehigh, Texas.

If you will read the answers given in the two previous issues of our weekly you will find certain advice given to correspondents that may readily be applied to your own case. Detectives as a rule graduate from some other vocation in which they have served for years. Some have been a town constable or marshal, others the sheriff of a county, but by far the greater number have been police officers. Having shown some peculiar aptitude for investigation and a thorough knowledge of the way in which thieves do their evil work, they are gradually given opportunities for testing their accomplishments, and end by becoming detectives. Depend upon it, only one in a score ever amounts to anything. Our advice to you by mail, and through the columns of our paper, is *don't*. If you will insist upon entering upon such work, and really believe you were born to bring evildoers to justice, then get a position on some police force, and the chances will come after a bit to test your ability. But above all, be a man as well as brave, and be true to yourself. Detectives are a sorely tempted class of men, and one must have an unusually strong character to resist the lures that are bound to beset his way.

"The best philosophers," said Leary, the celebrated Texas detective, "are the Hindus. You have to sell them light-food as well as light-fingered, for they can lift a watch or purse as easily with their feet as with their hands.

"Trained from childhood, these barefooted rascals are wonderfully skilful with their toes. This gives them a great advantage. A Hindu in a crowd will stand with his arms ostentatiously folded and sneak with his foot the wallet from your trousers pockets."

The skill of Japanese jugglers is illustrated by an incident which happened at a Japanese dinner, where one of them was employed to entertain the company.

A foreign guest determined to have no optical illusions about what the juggler did. He never let his glances be distracted, and was not once off his guard. Noticing this, the old juggler played to him entirely. An immense porcelain vase was brought in and set in the middle of the room, and the juggler, crawling up, let himself down into it slowly.

The foreign guest then sat for a half-hour without taking his eye from the vase, which, by the way, he had thoroughly examined so as to be certain it was sound and firm and stood on no trap-door.

After this prolonged watch, the rest of the company assailed him with laughter and jeers, and pointed to his side, where the old juggler was seated fanning himself, and had been sitting there for some minutes.

An excellent and cheap life-belt for persons learning to swim may be easily made by taking a yard and three-quarters of strong jeans, doubling and dividing it into nine compartments. A space of two inches should be left after each third compartment. Fill these divisions with very fine cuttings of cork, which may be made by slicing up old corks, or the material can be purchased from a dealer.

Eyelet holes should be worked at the bottom of each compartment to allow drainage for the water that will soak through. The neck-band and waist-strings for securing it to the body should be of stout webbing or broad tape, sewed on strongly with flax thread. Another method consists in placing a layer of fine cork cuttings in the lining of a vest, quilting it at intervals to prevent bunching. This, of course, will require a double lining in the back.

There are two lightships in New York harbor, or, to speak by the rule, in the Third District of the United States Lighthouse Establishment. The Third District of the United States Lighthouse Establishment comprises lights along Lake Champlain, the Hudson River, Long Island Sound, part of the coast of New Jersey, and around New York harbor. The headquarters of the Third District are at Tompkinsville, S. I., and the inspector in this depot is responsible for the right and regular working of 190 lights.

Of all his 190 charges, however, none are so interesting as the lightships which mark the entrance to the grandest harbor in the world. The Nimes Sandy Hook and Scotland lightships are as household words to most New Yorkers. Any schoolboy will readily pick them out upon a map of the harbor, and if he has been much of a water excursionist, experiences no difficulty in picturing to himself how they look swinging up and down on the long Atlantic surges. He will recall, in his mind's eye, the lonely, heavy, uncanny-looking hull of the lightship, out of which spring the sailless masts with black, bulbous heads and wonder if it is very awful out there at night when the winter blasts are howling round his bedroom windows and the big seas are chasing each other toward the low-lying sands of the Hook.

* * * *

Scotland and Sandy Hook lightships are about three miles apart as a line drawn almost due east from the Hook would. The Scotland is moored three miles at sea and the Sandy Hook just twice as many. The latter marks the entrance to the main channel for heavy draft ocean steamers, while coasters steer by the inner or Scotland ship.

Any one who desires to experience the poignant sensations of a life on the ocean wave within a few hours of home and friends should board one of the lightships, and spend a day and night with the crew. Given a heavy sea and a susceptible temperament, and he will soon be seasick and homesick at one and the same time. Perhaps he will ask the captain to let him swim back.

A lighthouse-tender might, without exaggeration, be likened to a swelled-out tug with a hoisting apparatus on an abnormally elongated funnel and. The function of the lighthouse-tender is to carry coal, oil, and provisions to the various houses within

the jurisdiction of the station. The depot at Staten Island is the general supply-station for the lighthouses of the United States.

The distance from Tompkinsville to the Sandy Hook lightship is about eighteen nautical miles. On a gray day the lightship seen from afar resembles some bird of brilliant plumage bobbing about on the long swells, for its hull is painted a dazzling red. A nearer approach reveals on its side the inscription, "Sandy Hook," painted in heroic letters of white, which stand out stunningly against the red background. The captain of the lightship has already sighted the tender and has hoisted the department flag at his masthead. The sea is calm, so the tender is made fast alongside, and we step on the deck of the lightship without any trouble.

The captain who commands the lightship stands upon her quarter-deck in the full uniform of a lighthouse-keeper, and greets us with the dignity of an admiral.

* * * *

The first thing that strikes one on board the Sandy Hook ship is the marvelous cleanliness of the decks. The captain, however, gives you little time for reflection. He proceeds to expound the mysteries of his ship with mathematical thoroughness. He begins at the mooring.

The ship is held in position by two mushroom anchors weighing about three thousand pounds each. A mushroom anchor is shaped precisely like a mushroom, and takes hold of the mud or sand with a grip that grows constantly stronger so that when it once becomes embedded its dislodgment is well-nigh impossible. The anchors are attached to a heavy two-inch chain. When I visited the ship there were seventy-five fathoms of this chain outside the hawse-holes. The chain can be lengthened or shortened at will, according to the violence of the sea. The tugging of the chain at the windlass is eased by a series of rubber drums or buffers, which rejoice in the expressive name of "surge relievers."

During the day the lights which give the ship its name are housed on deck in two little wooden houses, painted outside a brilliant red like the ship itself. There are eight lights to each lantern tower, and at sunset the roofs of the little red houses fly open and the lights are hoisted by windlass to their places at the masthead. Each ring of lights weighs 1,100 pounds. The lamps are of ordinary size ranged on an iron ring that encircles the mast. Each one is backed by a powerful reflector and furnished with a chimney of red glass. For the Sandy Hook ship displays red lights to distinguish it from the Scotland lightship, which shows white ones.

* * * *

To the casual observer a lightship looks more like a useless toy than anything seaworthy. A closer inspection, however, will reveal the fact that she is possessed of two sets of masts. Behind each of her lantern masts are her business masts, so to speak. These are supplied with sails, closely furled, of course, but ready for an emergency at a moment's notice. The crew of the ship, consisting of the captain, mate, cook, and five seamen, would be well able to handle her therefore should she break her moorings in a storm. The Sandy Hook ship has never been adrift, although subjected to several tremendous blows, notably that of March 12, 1888. Two large seaworthy boats are swung at her sides, and she is also supplied with a bell for fog signaling, which weighs 1,148 pounds and has a solemn and powerful tone.

Below decks the same scrupulous neatness is everywhere observable. Even the keys to the lockers are polished up until they show the burnished gold. The quarters of the crew are forward, and occupy about one-half of the cabin space. They mess beside the kitchen stove and sleep in hammocks slung to the cabin roof. Aft are the captain's quarters. His saloon and dining-room are very comfortable, and should be exceedingly cozy on a cold winter's night. In one corner is a little piano-organ, which, although it has seen much service, contributes considerably to the entertainment of the department's guests. Altogether, the ship is very pleasantly furnished.

The crew have only three months on shore in the twelve, and their terms of service are known as three months' cruises. When they will actually leave port depends on the season by which the ship is relieved. Sometimes she may be kept on the station for a longer period than six months, for the reason that there are sudden rises of the current of the sea, and would be apt to make it impossible to get her off for a short period.

The crew of a lightship are not allowed to have the pleasure of a run ashore. There is no time, for the ship is always in the vessel may have an occasional visit from some friend who comes down the decks, muster at the lamps. The cleaning and oiling of the lamps is the first and most important work of the day. On its completion the men are set to work cleaning other things. The captain never permits them to be idle, and woe betide the man whom he catches getting a "lightship grin" on him. Dinner is served at noon, and after that there are more odd jobs to be done.

The lamps are lighted and swung at the mastheads at sundown, and then all hands but the man on watch go to supper.

The pay of an able seaman on board the lightship is $25 a month and "found." The cook draws $35 a month; assistant lightship-keeper receives $480 a year, while the captain gets a salary of $800, these beside their "keep."

A French tradesman living in Montlucon boasts probably the most singular equipage that was ever designed, particularly for purposes of pleasure. This gentleman takes daily drives in a little gig drawn by a domesticated wild boar. The animal is a true wild boar and was captured by his owner and trainer in the Troncais forest. The boar is two years old. Taming him to harness was a trying process, but by dint of much patience and some whipcord he has become as docile to voice and rein as a lady's pony. The boar draws a specially constructed gig and trots as fast as some horses.

FRED RODGER'S FIND.

"Want any potatoes, er cabbages, er turnips?"

"No! Get away from here, boy."

"Don't want any bread, er mack'rel, er corned pork?"

"Didn't I tell you to clear out, you little imp! Now, get a move on you, and be quick about it."

"That's all right, boss; but I thought you might need somethin', being as you're camping out here. I supply all the fellers that come around each year, an' it struck me——"

Whack!

A short stick whizzed through the air and landed with a resounding thump on the lad's arm, causing him to drop a market basket he was carrying.

"There is something else that struck you," growled the one who had thrown the missile. He was a rough, villainous-looking man with hangdog face and disreputable appearance.

The two principals in the little dispute were standing near a camp pitched on the shore of a miniature lake.

There were three canvas tents in the group, one very large, and the others of ordinary size. If it was not for the extreme size of the principal habitation the camp would have appeared only one of the numerous fishing and hunting-outfits to be found near all such bodies of water during the summer season.

As it was, Fred Rodgers, huckster at large for the surrounding country, thought he had found a large and valuable prize in the shape of a whole family to supply with provisions, when he first saw the tents.

The lad lived in a small village some few miles from the lake, and it had been his custom to sell odds and ends to the summer campers in a laudable endeavor to scrape together sufficient money with which he could pay his way through the state university.

On reaching the vicinity of the lake that morning he had seen the gleam of canvas through the trees, and had hurried forward with the intention of securing the newcomer's trade.

To his surprise a man met him on the edge of the clearing, and in answer to the questions recorded above, had treated him in a most shabby and unwarrantable manner.

The vicious assault aroused the boy's wrath, but his assailant seemed so unprincipled that Fred deemed discretion the better part of valor, and retreated to a safe distance before continuing the conversation.

His basket still lay on the ground, with its varied contents of garden products scattered haphazard in all directions.

Still rubbing the injured arm, the boy deliberated on the best manner to rescue his stock in trade. He thought of running off for help from adjacent farms, but that would take some time, and meanwhile the ruffian might take it into his villainous head to kick the vegetables into the lake.

Fred resolved to temporize.

"I say, what do you mean, hittin' me that way?" he called out. "What have I done to yer?"

It was evident the man considered his temporary possession of the lad's produce a fine joke, as he leisurely moved over toward the scattered potatoes and cabbages, and began knocking them about with one foot, at the same time calling out to some invisible mate:

"Come out here, Bill; here's a great lark."

A rustle was heard inside the largest tent, and then a well-dressed man with rather an intelligent face appeared through the flap.

He had evidently been sleeping, as he stood rubbing his eyes for a moment before apparently taking in the situation.

Something in his appearance led Fred to believe that he could obtain help from him in recovering his property, and he said:

"Say, mister, won't you make that feller give me them things? I ain't done nothing to him, an' he struck me with a stick."

The new-comer looked from one to the other, and then a frown appeared on his brow.

"What is the matter here, Job?" he asked, a trifle sternly. "What are you doing to that boy?"

"Nothin'," replied the one addressed as Job sullenly. "That kid came around here where he ain't wanted, and I told him to be off several times."

"I just asked him to buy some potatoes and such stuff, sir; and he ups and hits me. I have been selling things to every camper that comes here, an' I thought you people might want something, too."

Bill turned to Job and whispered a few words. Then he turned to Fred.

"I guess we'll need a few articles. What have you got?"

"Cabbages, potatoes, turnips, an' carrots," promptly replied Fred, delighted at the turn of affairs.

As he spoke he stepped forward and gathered the articles into the basket.

"What is the whole thing worth?"

The lad figured rapidly for a moment.

"Dollar 'n twelve cents, sir."

"All right; dump the stuff," said Bill carelessly. "We'll take all you have. Job, pay the kid."

He then returned to the tent while the villainous-looking Job handed Fred a crisp new two-dollar bill.

"Take your money out o' that," he growled, scowling darkly. "It's a good t'ing the captain—I mean my friend there, sided wid ye. Now, git out of this, an' don't come back, nuther. What stuff we want we'll send to town for, see!"

Fred counted out the change without replying, and, slinging the empty basket on his arm, walked away.

He had done a good morning's work, and felt correspondingly happy, so he strolled along whistling a lively tune.

Just as he reached the edge of the woods lying back of the camp, he heard a loud shout.

"Hi, there, you boy! Wait a moment; I want to see yer."

Turning quickly, he beheld Job running toward him, waving his hands as if to attract his attention.

For a moment, Fred was tempted to take to his heels. The recollection of the ruffian's previous assault caused him to think that this was only a scheme to get him away from the camp, and inflict further punishment; but at last he resolved to wait and see what the fellow desired.

Puffing and blowing, Job reached his side, and immediately held out his hand, with the unexpected request:

"I say, young feller, give me that two-dollar bill I let yer have."

"What for?" asked Fred suspiciously.

"Oh! I'll give yer another one; don't you fear. That one you've got is an old keepsake, an' I let yer have it by mistake."

Something in the man's action increased the lad's suspicion, and he still hesitated. Job's statement that it was an "old keepsake" did not tally with the appearance of the money. It was crisp and new, and had evidently been recently issued.

Seeing that Fred did not evince a willingness to comply with his demand, Job made a sudden dash toward him, and catching the lad by the collar, proceeded to administer a severe shaking.

"Give it to me, consarn yer!" he grated, raising his fist. "If you don't fork it out in two seconds, I'll kill yer!"

Seeing that he meant what he said, Fred produced the bill and handed it to the ruffian without loss of time. Job made a grab for it, and after giving the lad another bill, stalked back to camp.

Just waiting to see that his new piece of money was of the same denomination, Fred took to his heels and never stopped running until he had placed a couple of miles between himself and the pugnacious Job.

"Well, that was a funny occurrence," he muttered, finally slowing up near a protecting farmhouse. "What on earth did he want with that bill, that's the question? It certainly looks queer. Can it be—— By gosh! I'll bet a pumpkin that's just what it was."

He scratched his head a moment, and then added:

"I reckon I'll take a peep around that camp to-night. There's something going on that ain't right. It's lucky I know the place around there, as I might get caught, an' then wouldn't that black-muzzled brute have a good time beatin' me to death."

Full of his new suspicions, Fred went about his work during the day devoured with impatience.

At last darkness arrived, and telling his father he was going out for a while, he rapidly covered the ground between the village and the camp.

Halting a short distance from the tents, he crept down to the edge of the water, and quietly disrobed. This did not require much time, as he only wore a pair of trousers and a shirt, so when he at last found himself in the state nature provides, he plunged into the lake and swam cautiously along the shore.

The night was just dark enough to favor his plan, and

he reached the little beach in front of the tents without discovery.

Approaching closer, Fred touched bottom near a mass of lily-pads, behind which he concealed himself, and then proceeded to take in the situation.

From where he stood to the camp was not more than thirty feet, and he was able to see or overhear anything very plainly.

There was a light in the large tent, and a hum of voices came from the interior. At first the listener could not make out the subject of conversation, but he finally overheard Job say:

"Well, the job's done, an' I move we commence work. What's the use of waitin' until to-morrow or next day, when we can get out a lot of the stuff to-night. The press is ready, an' we're safe in this place."

"I guess you are about right," replied a voice strange to Fred. "We have now worked almost a week getting that cellar ready, and the things from the depot, so why not begin the printing?"

"I am satisfied, but it is always best to be sure," spoke up the gentlemanly Bill. "We had a caller to-day—a boy that sells food around here. He is the only one in the neighborhood that we have seen, and I don't suppose he has any suspicions."

"Haven't I, though?" muttered the watcher in the lake exultantly. "You are making a sorry mistake, my friends, and you'll soon find it out."

"Huh! that kid," remarked Job contemptuously. "I'll bet a tenner he don't bother us no more. I gave him such a scare this afternoon that he fairly flew out o' sight. Come on; let's go down an' begin. Jim and Bob are on the watch outside, an' we needn't be afraid."

The youthful spy behind the lily-pads heard a shuffling noise in the tent, then all was quiet for a while.

He waited for further developments, his suspicions growing stronger with each passing moment.

Presently, a light whirring, as if from machinery, came to his ears, followed by a clank, clank of cog-wheels.

It was enough.

Swimming back to the spot where he had left his clothing, Fred dressed hurriedly, and started on a run for the distant village.

An hour later the constable heard a rap at his back door, and on opening it was surprised to see Fred Rodgers standing there. The lad rapidly explained all he had seen and heard, giving his suspicions as to the meaning of the strange happenings near the lake.

"Waal, I swan to goodness!" ejaculated the astounded official, looking as if he hardly believed Fred's story. Then, inviting the boy in, he reached for his hat, and said:

"You stay here till I come back, Fred. There's a man up at the hotel who's been ter see me this very evening about them people. He's a detective, an' says there's a big reward for the capture of a gang o' counterfeiters s'posed to hev come around this here neighborhood. Waal, I declar', to think of you ferretin' 'em out!"

And the honest old man, still muttering in a highly excited manner, disappeared, leaving Fred to wonder at his own luck, and also to dream of a reward of at least twenty dollars.

Within five minutes the constable returned, accompanied by a shrewd-faced stranger of determined appearance.

To him the lad told his story, not forgetting the episode of the two-dollar bill. The detective questioned him closely, and then bade the village official hastily get together a dozen well-armed men.

"Tell them it will mean a neat little sum for each if they do as I say," he added. "And don't be long, as the birds may fly away before we get there.

"You are a brave lad, and with a good head on your shoulders," he said to Fred, while waiting for the posse. "You won't lose anything by this, as Uncle Sam is never stingy with his rewards."

In the course of an hour twelve determined men, armed with rifles and shotguns, reported at the house, and, led by our hero, quickly covered the distance to the camp by the lake. On reaching the vicinity the detective divided his men, sending some toward the right, and with the others marched down to the spot where Fred had left his clothing on the first trip.

Not stopping to disrobe, the detective waded in a short distance, and then skirted the shore, followed by his aides. The lad went with this party.

Halting a moment near the tents, they listened intently, and heard all the signs previously mentioned by the young spy.

The whirr of machinery was plainly apparent, and completely satisfied, the detective whispered:

"Get your guns ready, boys. Don't hesitate to shoot if they show fight, as they are desperate men, and will kill you if necessary. Now, come on!"

He dashed forward, accompanied by the rest, but had hardly gone a dozen paces before a shot rang out, and one of the men fell to the ground, mortally wounded.

"Surround the tent. Don't let one escape," shouted the government officer, discharging his revolver at a shadowy form near a bush.

Just then several men came running up, and in a twinkling the sentries were captured. The newcomers were of the other posse, and, luckily combining, the large tent was closely surrounded.

Tearing open the flap, the detective exclaimed sternly:

"Surrender, or we'll kill the whole lot of you. There are five to one, so give yourselves up, and save trouble."

It was evident those inside concluded that he was right, as three men stepped out, and threw up their hands.

Fred had stood just behind the officer when he exposed the interior of the tent to view, and the lad could hardly believe his eyes. Instead of an ordinary room, he saw a large trap-door in the wooden floor, through which was visible an excavation, or cellar, containing a hand-press, and several small tables strewn with what seemed to be piles of greenbacks.

"This is a splendid haul!" exclaimed the detective, with glistening eyes. "It's the most complete outfit captured since that affair in Chicago."

Fred stood by while the counterfeiters were manacled, and he had the extreme satisfaction of seeing Job placed out of harm's way. Both the latter and Bill cursed him freely, but that did not effect the lad—he was too happy thinking of his sure reward.

That night the scoundrels were locked up in the village jail, and the evidence of their crime placed in safety until the trial.

A few weeks later, Fred received an official envelope from Washington, enclosing an announcement that a reward of a thousand dollars had been allotted him, and notifying his father that it was subject to draft. With the money Fred went through college, and then started in business for himself.

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